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By

JAMES H. SNOWDEN

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ANNUAL VOLUME

New York

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SNOWDEN'S
SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST QUARTER

Old Testament history is worth our repeated study because it is history and any history is valuable as it lays bare the roots out of which our civilization has grown.

> The past thus always throws light upon the present and enables us to understand and use it better as it gives us ideals and guides.

Our present powers and possessions are largely the accumulated inheritance of the past, and we can worthily appreciate and efficiently use it only as we know its history and development.

> Old Testament history is specially valuable as it uncovers the roots of our Christian faith and life, the most precious part of our inheritance.

Abraham and Moses and David were forerunners of John and Paul and of Jesus himself, and we can understand them fully only as we see them in the frame of the centuries of education and teachings that prepared the way for them.

> Often as we have gone over this history and studied these characters we derive new light and meaning and application from them as we go over them again.

The most familiar things are never exhausted but contain increasing depths and wonders to reward our further study.

> Large things always grow larger as we dwell upon them, and these characters are among the tallest figures of all time and will loom larger upon our understanding and appreciation as we again pass them in review and seek to penetrate deeper into their meaning.

THE IMPROVED UNIFORM SERIES COURSE

for 1924

FIRST QUARTER

OUTLINE OF OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY

FROM ABRAHAM TO SOLOMON

(FIRST HALF OF A SIX MONTHS' COURSE)

LESSON I.—JANUARY 6

A CHOSEN LEADER AND A CHOSEN LAND

Abraham and the Migration to Canaan

Golden Text: In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Gen. 12:3.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 23.

Lesson Material: Gen. 12:1—25: 10.

Lesson Text: Gen. 12:1–7; 18:17–19

Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:
2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:
3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.
4 So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram *was* seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.
5 And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.
6 ¶ And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite *was* then in the land.
7 And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him.

17 And the LORD said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do;
18 Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?
19 For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. A Call to a Far Country.
2. A Rough Root with Rich Blossoms.
3. Unquestioning Obedience.
4. Household and Substance.
5. Disillusionment!
6. A Great Promise.
7. Light on the Shadow.

Abraham steps upon the stage as one of the epochal figures of history.

In him we come to a new method of redemption.

The plan of washing the planet clean of its wickedness in a universal flood had been tried, but it did not drown the old Serpent of sin, and the bow in the cloud was a pledge that it would not be used again.

One man faithful to the true God was now to be called out and kept separate from the idolatrous world, and his descendants were to be guarded and trained as a chosen nation, a peculiar people, and through them should come a Redeemer mighty to save and finally in him all the world should be blessed.

In this plan outer mechanical means changing circumstances give way to inner moral means changing the heart; the material is superseded by the spiritual. This is a deep principle of the divine working: first that which is natural, afterward that which is spiritual.

We have here the beginning of the Jewish race, that strange and wonderful people that are separate from the world to this day. The work of redemption is here called off from the world at large and narrowed down to a select race for a limited time and a special purpose; not that the rest of the world

should be excluded from grace, but that a righteous seed should be preserved from utter destruction and that in the fulness of time salvation might come to all the ends of the earth.

God first made sure of one man in order at length to save all men. A fence is put around a wheatfield, not to keep it from the people, but to keep it for the people.

1. A Call to a Far Country

The call to Abram was to go out of his own country into a far land, he knew not where. The call suddenly uprooted his whole life, wrenching him away from country and kindred. His native land and scenes and associations were dear to him, but they were all to be cut off and left behind by this call.

The European emigrant has this trying experience, but he is young and is driven out by tyranny and poverty and is lured on into a land of freedom and splendid attractions. Abram was now seventy-five years old and was rich, yet he was to tear himself loose and push out into the desert towards an unknown country.

There must have been some imperative necessity for this call: what was it? Abram was now the one man in the world that had a living faith in the one true God, a strong grip on monotheism in the midst of a polytheistic world.

This faith was of such vital importance to the world that it had to be preserved at any cost. To save Abram and all the world it was necessary to isolate him and safeguard him from idolatrous infection. This was a radical remedy, but it was the only one that would work.

Christians must still come out of the world in spirit. We cannot save the world by being like the world; and we cannot thus be saved ourselves. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord.

2. A Rough Root with Rich Blossoms

On the hard-knotted root of this call grew a rich cluster of promises. For loss of country, Abram was to become the founder of a great nation:

for loss of earthly goods God would give him spiritual blessings and his name should be crowned with fame. There would be such union and identity of Abram with God that whoever touched the one touched the other and would be repaid in kind.

The good man has God behind him.

Thus for all his loss Abram not only would be blessed himself, but he should be a blessing, unconsciously radiating holy influences on all around, and in the wide sweep of his power all the families of the earth should be made better by him. Thus for all his loss Abram was to receive marvelous compensation.

When God takes anything from us he always puts some better thing in its place.

For every material loss there is some richer spiritual gain. God never routs us out of a comfortable nest simply to get us out and make us uncomfortable; his calls are upward to wider service, larger life, purer joy.

Great calls to duty are always topped out with great promises. God does not ask us to serve him for nothing while the devil is offering big pay. Men must have great rewards to spur them on to high action.

All the great achievements of the world have been born of great hopes. It was the splendid star of gold that hung glittering over the East that lured Columbus across the unknown, horror-infested sea. Jesus endured the cross for the joy that was set before him. The command, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," is completed and crowned with the transcendent promise, "and thou shalt be saved."

We are not to serve God for pay, but out of loyal service to him will come great rewards.

This promise to Abram has been grandly fulfilled. If he had stayed in Haran he would have been long since lost among the forgotten millions of that buried civilization, but coming out from them he became one of the most influential and famous men of all time.

3. Unquestioning Obedience

"So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him:" there is something sublime in this calm statement. Dropping his old life without debate or delay, he departed as the Lord had spoken. "By faith Abraham when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed."

Faith was the powerful mainspring of this heroic action.

Abram did not know whither he was going, but he knew that the Lord was leading him. He did not ask to see the distant scene: one step enough for him. There was no gap between his creed and his conduct, but the two coincided and made one music.

The great need of our lives is to keep our obedience abreast of our knowledge. The Lord has spoken to us and we know his will: now let us have brave faith to do his will, though it be to leave pleasant things behind and push out into the unknown desert.

4. Household and Substance

Abram took with him his household and his substance. Wife and kindred and servants must have already in some degree shared his faith, and he was able to take them with him out of the old life of idolatry into the new life of faith in the one true God.

The Christian is not to go alone into the kingdom.

Jesus finds Philip and then Philip finds Nathanael. Thus the golden chain has had link after link added to it until it has lengthened down to us and some one found you and me.

It is now our duty to find the next one and keep the chain extending on until it binds Christ's first with his final coming. Especially should each one endeavor to lead his own household into the kingdom.

Our substance also should go with us into the new life and serv-

ice. Conversion has not struck clear through us until it has penetrated our pockets and seized our pocketbooks and bank accounts. All that we have belongs to Christ and must be taken out of the service of idolatry and be used only for his glory.

5. Disillusionment!

The long journey is over, and the scene suddenly shifts to the promised land, and what is the first thing we read? "The Canaanite was then in the land."

Does not the statement startle us and seem to mock poor Abram's faith?

Instead of getting out of idolatry he had got into it worse than ever. Instead of finding a richer country he had found a rocky strip of coast. He had left an old and splendid civilization for half-civilized tribes. Did it ever enter the old man's heart that his faith was an illusion and delusion and that he had made a mistake?

No, he had made no mistake because God had made no mistake. Abram was separated from idolatry in the new scenes as he could not have been in the old, and the new country was rich in possibilities and had a great future.

God in blessing us is looking far ahead.

Nevertheless Abram was not yet free from temptation and trial. The Canaanite was there to endanger and vex him, and he still had battles to fight and plenty of hard work to do.

Wherever we go we shall find the Canaanite in the land. Disillusionment still waits at the end of many a promising pathway, and through disappointment and trial must we ever win our way to the heights of victory. God may change our place and work, but wherever he drops us down we shall have temptations to resist, disappointments to meet, and hardships to bear.

6. A Great Promise

One presence, however, he did find in the new country: God. The Lord appeared unto him there. His presence sustained and cheered the weary pilgrim's heart.

However far we travel we cannot get outside of God's presence and care, and he will appear unto us.

The promise was renewed unto Abram that his seed should have the land, and the Lord's promise to Abram was just as good as the deed. Up went an altar and the new land was dedicated to God in worship.

The altar should be set central and first in our lives, for it is the foundation and core of all ownership and prosperity and blessing as it radiates its divine influence over all our possessions and thoughts and deeds.

Yet the journey was not ended. Abram removed thence and ever kept pitching his tent toward the west and south. Wherever he stopped he could not stay, but soon found reason for moving on.

Life with us is a constant pilgrimage. Our habitations are only tents pitched for one little day and must soon be removed.

Wherever we are today, we shall be elsewhere tomorrow. Move on we must, for here we have no continuing city, but we seek a country and look for a city which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God.

7. Light on the Shadow

The scene of the lesson shifts to a later day when Abraham stands looking down into the valley of the Dead Sea upon cities that were doomed to perish in their own wickedness. The Lord had marked these pits of iniquity as black as the pitch around their shores for swift and terrible destruction

Yet he first took his friend Abraham into his confidence and revealed to him what he was about to do.

The oncoming cloud of judgment seemed to be on the point of blotting out the promise made to Abraham, and the Lord would assure him that he was still standing within that black storm-cloud keeping watch above his own.

This is the meaning of that strange scene on the cliff overlooking these doomed cities, and on the dark shadow of the cloud God

threw the light of his sure promise. "The friendship of the Jehovah is with them that fear him, and he will shew them his covenant."

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. Compare the emigration of Abram with that of the Pilgrims.
2. Give other instances from Scripture of how hard duties resulted in great blessings.
3. Illustrate unquestioning obedience from the life of Jesus and of Paul.
4. Give some Scripture teaching on the subject of our substance.
5. What great disillusionment did the Jews experience in their hope of a Messiah?
6. What light do we have on the dark problems of the world?

LESSON II.—JANUARY 13

THE LONG SOJOURN IN EGYPT

Joseph and the Migration to Egypt

Golden Text: The Lord shall keep thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. Psalm 121:7.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 124.

Lesson Material: Genesis 37—50.

Lesson Text: Gen. 47:1–12

Then Joseph came and told Pharaoh, and said, My father and my brethren, and their flocks, and their herds, and all that they have, are come out of the land of Canaan; and, behold, they *are* in the land of Goshen.

2 And he took some of his brethren, *even* five men, and presented them unto Pharaoh.

3 And Pharaoh said unto his brethren, What *is* your occupation? And they said unto Pharaoh, Thy servants *are* shepherds, both we, *and* also our fathers.

4 They said moreover unto Pharaoh, For to sojourn in the land are we come; for thy servants have no pasture for their flocks; for the famine *is* sore in the land of Canaan: now therefore, we pray thee, let thy servants dwell in the land of Goshen.

5 And Pharaoh spake unto Joseph, saying, Thy father and thy brethren are come unto thee:

6 The land of Egypt *is* before thee; in the best of the land make thy father and brethren to dwell; in the land of Goshen let them dwell: and if thou knowest *any* men of activity among them, then make them rulers over my cattle.

7 And Joseph brought in Jacob his father, and set him before Pharaoh: and Jacob blessed Pharaoh.

8 And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old *art* thou?

9 And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage *are* a hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.

10 And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from before Pharaoh.

11 ¶ And Joseph placed his father and his brethren, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded.

12 And Joseph nourished his father, and his brethren, and all his father's household, with bread, according to *their* families.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. The Settlement in Goshen.

2. The Brethren Presented to Pharaoh.

3. Pharaoh's Directions to Joseph.

4. Jacob and Pharaoh.

It is a long stride from Abraham to the settlement of his descendants in Egypt, for in these lessons we are only touching important points in this history. Abraham himself in his wanderings had strayed down into Egypt (chapter 12) and had looked upon that ancient civilization all unconscious of the strange part it was to play in the fulfilment of the divine promise made to him.

His son Isaac had succeeded him and Jacob had followed Isaac, and the tragic story of Jacob's sons had carried on the family history. The complicated plot that had sold Joseph into slavery in Egypt and the dramatic events that had raised him to be Prime Minister clothed with all authority in that land, had been enacted, and the present lesson takes up the story at the point where Joseph brought his father's family down into Egypt and settled them there.

As we look back upon the history we see the plan of Providence, that was largely hidden from the human actors involved in it, uncovered and disclosed to view, very much as when the cover of a watch is opened we see the complicated concealed mechanism. But the mechanism was there all the while, moving the hands, and God is ever present in the world moving and controlling its events.

1. The Settlement in Goshen

Joseph appeared before Pharaoh and announced to him, "My father and my brethren, and their flocks, and their herds, and all that they have, are come out of the land of Canaan; and behold, they are in the land of Goshen." Goshen was a district on the north-eastern border of Egypt, and probably the location was chosen as separating the Israelites in some degree from the Egyptians and also as leaving the way open for a readier escape from the country.

It must have been a hard wrench and sore trial for Jacob with his family to make this change from the scenes that were familiar and dear to him, to this land of mighty and mysterious civilization, so remote from all that he had known in agriculture and architecture and religion.

But he had visited the sanctuary at Beer-sheba and received assurance that God was sending him down into Egypt for a divine purpose and that in due time he would become a great nation there and would then be brought up again (chapter 46:1–4).

And so this descent into Egypt was no accidental and meaning-

less event, but there was a far-seeing divine guidance and object in it.

Israel was sent to school in Egypt, a land then of renowned learning and famous achievements, the schoolmaster of that ancient world. The magnificent contents of the tomb of Tutankhamen that have recently amazed the world are visible remains and proofs of the splendor of Egyptian civilization in the time of Joseph.

This land had something to contribute to the education of the Israelites and to their preparation for the great part they were to play in the world long after Egypt had sunk into impotence and insignificance.

God is always working on a long plan, and when he seems to be leading us down into Egyptian hardships he is achieving for us some better thing than we know. Little did the Pilgrims and Puritans dream as they landed on the bleak New England shore that they were the seed of "a great nation."

2. The Brethren Presented to Pharaoh

Joseph now took five of his brothers and "presented them unto Pharaoh," and an interesting scene followed. Pharaoh inquired of them, "What is your occupation?"

This was a keen practical question by which the Egyptian ruler judged the newcomers.

Exalted as he was in his station high above all common needs, yet he realized the importance of men having an "occupation" that made them producers and useful citizens of the country. Egypt was a vast beehive of human industry, and Pharaoh was not anxious to welcome drones into it. No doubt he considered that he had enough of these already, and he wanted only such immigrants as would add to the useful work and wealth of the community.

This is a point that has not lost its pungency and application in our modern world which is a vast system of industry. Wealth is the product of work, and by no magic means can this law be evaded.

It is true that exceptional individuals may come into possession of it through inheritance or through unjust methods, but the community as a whole can produce and increase wealth only through work. The work may be of the hand or of the head, but none the less it is exertion that costs effort and does useful things.

Too many are trying to slip through the world in white collars and cuffs without perspiration. They are afraid of a calloused hand and soiled linen.

Most men of wealth, who also have sense and want their sons to have it, bring them up in some useful service. They do not want their sons to be embarrassed when the census taker asks for their "occupation" and have to stammer out that they are "capitalists" or "gentlemen."

Nobody should be ashamed of an honest occupation but should be proud of it. A man ought to be ashamed to go through this world and only take from it and add nothing to it.

"Sure good," says Ruskin, "is first in feeding people, then in dressing people, and lastly in rightly pleasing people with arts, or sciences, or any other subject of thought." "The thistle that grows in thy path," said rugged, honest Thomas Carlyle, hater of drones and shams, "dig it out, that a blade of grass, or a drop of nourishing milk, may grow there instead. The waste cotton-shrub, gather its waste white down, spin it, weave it: that in place of the idle litter there may be folded webs, and the naked skin of man be covered."

Joseph's brethren were men of this stamp, for they answered, "Thy servants are shepherds, both we, and our fathers." They were not ashamed of their occupation, though it appears that shepherds were despised among the Egyptians (46:34). They lived close to nature and spent days and nights in lowly toil, but because of their faithful service people had clothes and Pharaoh himself was robed in splendid apparel.

Everyone should be engaged in such work as will make none poorer but will add to the real wealth of the world. There is good authority for saying that if any one does not thus do his part in the world he "is worse than an infidel" (I Tim. 5:8).

3. Pharaoh's Directions to Joseph

Joseph's brethren in accordance with the family plan had requested that they might settle in Goshen, and Pharaoh graciously fell in with this request and granted it. He felt his great obligation to Joseph as his Prime Minister who had delivered the land in time of famine, and possibly also he was willing that these shepherds, who might prove annoying if not dangerous immigrants, should be on the border of his country where they might the more easily be gotten rid of.

And so, possibly with a grand gesture, he swept his hand over the whole land of Egypt and said it was theirs, and then carefully located them in and restricted them to Goshen, where they would have good pasture for their flocks and be less a cause of anxiety to Egypt.

> Pharaoh appears as a master of gracious etiquette and deference to the wishes of others and yet was expert in bringing them around to his own way. It is a fine gift and art to be able to please others and yet get one's own way at the same time.
>
> Tact plays an important part in the conduct of life, whether in society, or business, or in national and international affairs. A little lubrication makes all the machinery of life run smoothly. Consideration and courtesy are often a good business investment as well as a Christian grace.

Pharaoh again showed his practical turn of mind and fine business hand by directing Joseph, "If thou knowest any men of activity among them, then make them rulers over my cattle."

> This is an acknowledgment of the economic fact and law that all men are not of equal ability and worth and that some are fitted for places of higher service and responsibility than others.

Pharaoh did not want his cattle placed in charge of incompetent men even though they were Egyptians, and desired the most capable men in his service even though they were foreigners and despised Hebrews.

> We must have the most competent men to rule over our affairs from shepherds up to kings and presidents.

More and more does our vast complex modern world depend upon the

trained ability and efficiency of leaders, and we must seek those men out and give them their due place and authority. In our democracy opportunities to places of expert ability should be freely open so that from the lowest and humblest beginnings workers may rise to the highest places.

And there should be no prejudice against and envy of those who have won their way to higher service, but they should have their due honor and reward. It will not help the ship for the common sailors to throw Columbus overboard, and we would deny our leaders their true rights and rewards at our own loss and peril.

This principle applies in the church as well as in the state and in the industrial world.

4. Jacob and Pharaoh

Joseph now brought his old father Jacob into the presence of Pharaoh and a touching interview ensues. These two men so widely separated in age and station, race and religion, yet treat each other with the utmost deference and courtesy.

Great and noble souls are lifted above all considerations of external place and condition and respect the simple and supreme dignity and worth of human personality.

Pharaoh opened the interview with the question, "How old art thou?" This question in connection with very old people is one of interest over the whole world and down to our own day. (See such recent books as G. Stanley Hall's *Senescence* and W. Robertson Nicoll's *Round of the Clock*.)

Age appeals to our respect and reverence, for the world over it stands for general uprightness and worth of life. Wickedness cannot long survive its own disobedience to the laws of health, and righteousness keeps the commands and deserves length of days.

One test of youth is the way it regards and treats old age, and this is also a test of our Christian civilization. Savagery has no use for old people and puts them out of the way, but Christian society honors them and smooths their last days.

Jacob's review of his life is pathetic in its sad recital of his burdened days. As he looked back over them they seemed few and evil to him and doubtless there crowded upon his consciousness the memory of his long early exile from home, his hard days of toil, the sorrow of his beloved Rachel's death, the unforgettable bitterness of Joseph's loss, and all the strange vicissitudes and tragedies of his checkered life. In retrospect his long life shortened up into a few evil days.

So do some lives seem to those that have passed through their pilgrimage, setting in a sombre sunset, and others have a more satisfying retrospect, closing in golden light at evening time.

But whether our days be few or many, swathed in cloud and swept with storm, or bathed in light, we are but pilgrims on the earth and look for a better country, even an heavenly.

Suggestive Questions and Topics.

1. Give a brief review of the events leading to this lesson.
2. What should be our attitude towards common toilers?
3. Is it right to aspire after high places, and how should we endeavor to reach them?
4. If wealth is a social product, to what extent should each one share in it?
5. What should be our attitude towards old age?
6. How did Joseph treat his aged father and his family?

LESSON III.—JANUARY 20

MOSES CALLED TO DELIVER ISRAEL

Moses and the Deliverance from Egyptian Bondage

Golden Text: By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. Heb. 11:24-25.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 130.

Lesson Material: Exodus 1:1—12:36.

Lesson Text: Exodus 3:1–12

Now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father in law, the priest of Midian: and he led the flock to the back side of the desert, and came to the mountain of God, *even* to Horeb.

2 And the Angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush *was* not consumed.

3 And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.

4 And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here *am* I.

5 And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest *is* holy ground.

6 Moreover he said, I *am* the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.

7 ¶ And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which *are* in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows;

8 And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites.

9 Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them.

10 Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.

11 ¶ And Moses said unto God, Who *am* I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?

12 And he said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this *shall be* a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. ***The Flame in the Bush.***
2. ***A Cry Heard in Heaven.***
3. ***God Calls upon Moses for Help.***
4. ***Moses Raises an Objection.***
5. ***The Objection Answered.***

The scene again suddenly shifts from Egypt, Moses an epochal figure in history is on the stage of action, and we find him far away in Midian under the shadows of Mount Horeb. Nearly eighty years have passed since he was left as a child in Pharaoh's court. After he was grown to manhood he did not forget his own people, but was deeply concerned over their enslaved condition and probably was meditating some bold scheme of deliverance.

One day, seeing an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, he killed the Egyptian and hid his body in the sand. When Pharaoh discovered this Moses had to fly for his life.

He turned up in Midian, where he settled in the family of a sheik, married his daughter and adopted a shepherd life. For forty years he lived in this retirement.

These were not lost years, but were a necessary part of his preparation for his great work.

At the age of forty in Egypt he was educated and eager, but he was impulsive and undisciplined. He could not control himself and therefore he was not fitted to control others. He needed to have his roots of character deepened and his powers of action ripened.

Such growth takes place in solitude and silence. The tree pours years of hidden life into the rosy apple. The meteor travels through millions of invisible miles before it explodes in splendor.

Great men come up out of years of obscurity to do their work. Jesus took thirty years of preparation for just three years of public ministry.

Forty years of meditation and growth in the wilderness put the finishing touches on Moses. The man for the hour was now ready.

It took eighty years to make him, but he was worth the cost, and God now called him to his great task.

1. The Flame in the Bush

Moses was keeping sheep when he saw the glory of God burning in the bush and received the call to his work. So were the shepherds watching their flocks by night when the glory of heaven poured through the rent sky and angels sang the good news that Christ was born.

One does not need to be in some great cathedral or high place to see the divine presence and receive messages from heaven: God is nigh us, even in our hearts, and in the home or at our place of business or in the street or wilderness we can be conscious of his nearness and hear his voice.

The flocks of Moses had nibbled the grass off the plains and he had led them up on the slopes of Horeb, the same mountain on which afterward he received the Ten Commandments and hence called the mountain of God. Here in the solitude a strange sight caught the attention of the shepherd. A flame of fire glowed in the bush and yet the bush was not consumed.

Curiosity seized his mind and started him on a path of inquiry that led to a great revelation. An inquiring turn of mind that approaches every new fact with a "why" is the secret of growing knowledge and has led to many of the greatest discoveries in the world.

As the shepherd drew near, God called to him out of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses." With instant obedience he responded, "Here am I." And God said, "Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet: for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground."

The flame in the bush was a symbol of the divine presence.

Fire fittingly represents God: it illuminates and warms and vivifies and is thus the source of guidance and growth and beauty. God's power glows in the sun and shoots from every star and burns in every bush and the whole earth is full of his glory. "Earth's crammed with heaven, and every common bush afire with God."

But not every eye can discern his presence; only reverent souls can see the vision splendid.

The flame in the bush was no empty sign but was charged with meaning, and out of it came a divine message. God is not simply making a display of his power and presence in the world, but he has something to say to the listening soul of the greatest value.

Moses' response, "Here am I," is the attitude of every obedient soul. The shepherd did not know what was wanted of him, but he was ready for anything.

When God calls for us we must not be too particular about what he wants us for, but simply go.

The first requirement made of Moses was reverence. He was bidden to put his shoes off and consciously stand on holy ground.

The Orientals take their shoes off before entering a holy place, and we should observe some attitude of reverence in the house of God. To sit bolt upright and stare around during public prayer is as irreverent as it is impertinent and vulgar. We cannot hear God or do his will rightly unless we have that reverence that is the mother of respect and humility and teachableness and obedience.

2. A Cry Heard in Heaven

God now announced his purpose to Moses. He revealed himself as the God of his fathers, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, thus rooting himself far back in Moses' ancestry and gathering around the divine name the sacred associations and experiences, the promises and hopes of many generations.

God is not a new being and an experiment with us, but he was our fathers' God and comes to us certified by all their experience.

The Lord now declared to Moses that he had seen the affliction of his people in Egypt and heard their cry and had come down to deliver them and bring them into the promised land.

He was not blind and deaf to what was going on in Egypt, but was ever standing "within the shadow, keeping watch above his own."

It is one of the fundamental and most precious truths of the Bible that God is touched with the feeling of our infirmities and is ever ready to hear the voice of our cry. A blind impersonal force at the center of the universe ruthlessly grinding out its way and grinding us up in its jagged iron wheels is an intolerable thought.

A personal God and sympathetic Father is an unspeakably precious faith, full of life and peace.

"I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry," "know their sorrows," "I am come down to deliver": old John Brown delighted to mark such passages as these in his Bible and apply them to those that cried "by reason of their taskmasters" in his day; and they still apply to us in all our afflictions and should fill us with faith and comfort, patience and peace.

3. God Calls upon Moses for Help

The Lord having said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt," will he not now go himself and right the grievous wrong? No, this is not the divine method of procedure. "Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh." "All power is given unto me: Go ye therefore."

This is ever the divine logic and course of action. When God has a work to do he immediately calls upon men to do it.

The best worker is he that gets others to work, and this is wherein the genius of captains of industry consists: they can efficiently guide and inspire thousands of workers. God is the great Organizer, making us coworkers with him and using us to work out his plans and purposes.

This is one of the greatest dignities of human nature and one of the grandest inspirations of life. Every man who is at the right work is sent of God. The mechanic and merchant have a divine mission and commission as well as the prophet and apostle.

All true workers are coworkers with God. Success in life is doing the work to which God has sent us and those that get into other places are misfits and failures.

Every mission on which God sends us is to deliver his people from some form of bondage, whether it be from cold and hunger, or from disease or ignorance or sin; never does he send us to lay burdens on them.

We fulfil this mission when as industrial workers we deliver from physical want and suffering; or as teachers from ignorance; and in the highest degree when through the gospel we bring liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.

4. Moses Raises an Objection

Moses met this call with an objection: "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh?" This doubtless expressed his sense of inability and humility.

He never would have sought this call and its greatness overwhelmed him.

It was right for him not to push himself into this work and not to go until he was sent. Many run before they are called, especially to high places.

But Moses underestimated his powers and pressed his objection too far. He forgot that God was the judge of his ability and fitness.

He urged the point that he was not eloquent, but was slow of speech (4:10); as much as to say, "I am no speaker—send Aaron, he is the eloquent member of our family." Yet Moses in due time uttered great thoughts that still thunder through the world, but who can quote anything that Aaron ever said?

We may be too modest and too willing to underestimate our powers when God calls us to a work. We think that if we had richer gifts and larger means we might accomplish something worth while, but with our few gifts and meager means we have no chance.

So thought the disciples with their five loaves, but with those loaves under the blessing of Christ they fed five thousand men. Moses thought he could do nothing, and yet he was the one man that could deliver Israel. However small our means there is something we can do that no one else in all the world can do.

5. The Objection Answered

This objection was met and the call was backed up with a great promise. "Certainly I will be with thee." God had not overlooked this point in his plan. He had not constructed an engine and forgotten to supply the energy. Though he was using human agency, yet he was not building his plan on human weakness but on divine omnipotence. Moses himself against Pharaoh was nothing, but Moses with God was everything.

Moses was to supply the human part and God the divine part, and the two together would be irresistible.

God never sends a man to a work without giving him ability to do that work.

"Lo, I am with you always" is Christ's promise to his disciples, and if God be for us, who can be against us?

"Ye shall serve God upon this mountain" was the assurance of this promise. Moses by the vivid imagination of faith was to see the work done, and then in the strength and inspiration of that faith he was to go and do it.

This is the way faith works along every line. The inventor by faith sees his magic machine in operation and is as sure of its success as though it were before his very eyes, and impelled by this assurance he proceeds to work it out.

We are to have such a vivid and vital trust in God that we are to realize his promises as fulfilled, and then we can act upon them with inspiration and power. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen.

Suggestive Questions and Topics.

1. Give a summary of the early life of Moses.
2. Give instances of long quiet preparation for public service.
3. Why do so many cries from earth to heaven apparently go unheard?
4. Why does God call upon us to help him?
5. How can we make God's promises more real to our faith?

LESSON IV.—JANUARY 27

ISRAEL SAVED AT THE RED SEA

God's Guidance from Egypt to Sinai

Golden Text: The Lord is my strength and song: and he is become my salvation. Exodus 15:2.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 106:1-9.

Lesson Material: Exodus 12:37—18:27.

Lesson Text: Exodus 14:21-31

21 And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go *back* by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry *land*, and the waters were divided.

22 And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry *ground:* and the waters *were* a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.

23 ¶ And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea, *even* all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen.

24 And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the LORD looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians,

25 And took off their chariot wheels, that they drave them heavily: so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the LORD fighteth for them against the Egyptians.

26 ¶ And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen.

27 And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea.

28 And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, *and* all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them.

29 But the children of Israel walked upon dry *land* in the midst of the sea; and the waters *were* a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.

30 Thus the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore.

31 And Israel saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and his servant Moses.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. The Pillar of Cloud.
2. Light and Darkness.

3. A Dry Path Through the Sea.
4. Engulfed Egyptians.
5. A Great Crossing.

In due time Moses appeared in Egypt and the land of Pharaoh writhed in agony under the repeated lash of plagues. Finally came the last dreadful stroke. At midnight the Lord smote all the firstborn in Egypt. Instantly there was a scene of indescribable confusion and horror throughout the land.

One thought seized the panic-stricken Egyptians: the Hebrews must be gotten out of the land before another morning's sun.

Pharaoh sent in hot haste for Moses and Aaron and ordered them to take their people and flocks and be gone.

The Passover had prepared them for departure and the start was made. Their course ran southeastward and in a few days they struck a northern arm of the Red Sea. Pharaoh had already repented of his action and was closing in behind them with his chariots of war. The Israelites were caught between Pharaoh and the sea, and it seemed that all was lost.

That night, amidst a terrible storm, they passed through the divided waters of the sea, and the next morning they stood on the other side and saw the dead bodies of the Egyptians washed up on the shore.

The exodus was the most dramatic and thrilling event in the history of the Jews and has been celebrated in memorial and song and story to this day. It is one of the epochal events of the world, and marks the greatest crossing in history.

1. The Pillar of Cloud

Before the Israelites entered the sea the pillar of cloud that had marched before them moved to the rear and hung as a veil between them and the pursuing Egyptians.

This pillar was a symbol of God's presence and protection and guidance.

From every quarter of the camp, or moving column, its majestic form was visible day and night, floating as a mass of fleecy whiteness, or waving

its flaming banner of fire. It was a splendid picture language, or child's word, telling of the divine presence and protection.

This cloud has long since vanished into air and we are no longer given such language. We do not need it. We have a better means of divine presence and guidance in the inspired Work, which reveals the truth of God, and in Jesus, who is Immanuel, God with us.

Under the light of these revelations we see that God is everywhere and all things are symbols of his presence.

Every cloud is a manifestation of God and messenger of mercy and the whole earth is crammed with his presence. In him we live and move and have our being, and the spiritual eye can see his pillar of cloud by day and his banner of light by night.

2. Light and Darkness

The same pillar that was a means of light and guidance to the Israelites was a means of darkness and confusion to the Egyptians. It enveloped the Egyptians in its fog and shut them off from the Israelites; and out of it shot lightnings that terrified them.

This illustrates a deep truth in the very constitution of the world.

The same agencies bless those that are in the right and blight those that are in the wrong. The same railway train that carries its passengers to their destination in safety crushes those that stand upon its track. The same government protects its law-abiding citizens and punishes law-breakers. The same sunlight builds up a living plant and makes it bloom and decomposes into dust one that is dead.

All of God's laws work together for the good of the obedient and for the punishment of the disobedient. The same attributes of omnipotence and omniscience that are the safety and comfort of the righteous are the terror and destruction of the wicked.

The gospel itself is a savor of life unto life to those that believe, and a savor of death unto death to those that believe not. The universe is two-sided and everything in it is for us or against us according as we are in the path of obedience to its laws or are in rebellion against it.

3. A Dry Path Through the Sea

At the moment when the Israelites were caught between Pharaoh and the sea and all was confusion and terror, "Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left."

The great miracle is told with impressive simplicity.

Tradition and poetry would have embellished the narrative with richer rhetoric, but the account in its severe self-restraint bears the marks of truth.

The miraculous nature of the event is indubitable, and yet God brought it about through natural means. A terrific storm raged all night and a strong east wind blew the water off the shallow sea bottom and left it dry. Storms have produced similar effects in the Gulf of Suez in modern times.

God honors ordinary means and keeps close to nature even in working miracles.

Who can tell where the natural leaves off and the supernatural begins in the world around us? They are both the work of God and are parts of one harmonious system.

Across the soft sandy bottom, sprinkled with spray torn from angry billows, protected from the Egyptians by the pillar of cloud marching behind them, the Israelites escaped from bondage into liberty and entered upon their career as a nation. So did the Pilgrims escape across the Atlantic, and this grand experience is often repeated on a small scale in our own lives.

Providence sometimes leads us into a narrow defile between mountain and sea, with disaster pressing us close behind and before, and there seems no way of deliverance.

These are times that try our faith and we must stand still and see the salvation of the Lord. Then the command comes to go forward and as we move perhaps seeing only one step at a time,

the way opens through the very heart of the obstruction and where rolled angry waves there is now dry land for our feet.

Our God is a great God, and strong wind and stormy sea obey him.

4. Engulfed Egyptians

The pursuing Egyptians rushed in after the retreating Israelites. Avarice and revenge and defiance of Israel's God made them reckless and furious.

Their blinded folly resulted in an unparalleled tragedy.

The storm was at the height of its fury. The pillar of cloud became a pillar of fire blazing with lightnings. Amidst lightning flash and thunder crash and the roar of the sea the Egyptians became terrorized and panic stricken. The wheels of their chariots were clogged and wrenched off in the sand.

They began to realize that the God of Israel was fighting against them, and amidst the awful confusion the cry was raised to fly.

But it was too late. The Hebrew hosts were now safe on the solid shore, and at the divine command Moses stretched his hand back over the sea. The waters loosed from their restraint rushed and leaped with deafening roar and maddened foam upon the struggling, shouting, cursing Egyptians, smothering their cries and burying warriors and horses and chariots under the waves. Not one man escaped.

With the morning light the sea was again in its place, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the shore.

This dramatic event seized upon the Hebrew imagination and wrought itself into the great poem contained in the next chapter and into other psalms. "I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea."

Good men can go where bad men cannot follow. The Lord's guidance gives safety and they that follow Pharaoh run terrible risks. The same mighty agencies that God uses for the protection of the righteous he also wields for the retribution of the wicked.

Yet his judgments are never arbitrary and unjust. The Egyptians brought this doom upon themselves. It was of their own will and wickedness that they rushed into this devouring sea. Sinners reap just what they sow.

" They would none of my counsel; they despised all my reproof: therefore they shall eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices " (Prov. 1:30 31). Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

5. A Great Crossing

"But the children of Israel walked over upon dry land in the midst of the sea."

This simple statement marks one of the greatest crossings in history.

"They had passed in that night from Africa to Asia; they had crossed one of the great boundaries which divide the quarters of the world; a thought always thrilling, how much more when we reflect on what a transition is involved in them. Behind the African hills, which rose beyond the Red Sea, lay the strange land of their exile and bondage—the land of Egypt with its mighty river, its immense buildings, its monster-worship, its grinding tyranny, its overgrown civilization. This they had left to revisit no more. And before them stretched the level plains of the Arabian desert where their fathers and their kindred had wandered in former times, where their great leader had fed the flocks of Jethro, through which they must advance onwards till they reach the Land of Promise."

But the moral change was immensely greater than the physical. Behind them lay slavery, before them lay freedom. Behind them lay idolatry, before them lay spiritual worship. Behind them lay the stagnant polluted Nile, before them lay the rushing Jordan and limpid Galilee whose shores should be forever hallowed by the footprints of Jesus.

Behind them were the monster temples and pyramids and the pagan priests and rites of Egypt, and before them were the true Tabernacle and Temple, Sinai and Jerusalem, psalmists and prophets and apostles, and in the fulness of time as the fulfilment and blossom of all their national development and glory, the promised Messiah, the Son of God.

Human agency played a very subordinate part in this wonderful deliverance which was wrought by the direct interposition and power of Almighty

God; and it remained through all Jewish history and song as the supreme illustration and proof of God's care over his people.

It is still a grand illustration of deliverance from sin into salvation. Behind us lies the slavery of sin and before us lies the liberty of righteousness. Behind us we leave the selfishness and tyranny and idolatry of the world and before us we enter into the love and brotherhood and spiritual worship of the kingdom of God.

The Christian life is one of hope ever looking forward into new and grander vistas opening before it. The best things for the Christian are ever yet to come.

Our Promised Land lies not behind us in this world, but before us, stretching beyond the horizon into the eternal world, where its shore touches the glassy sea and where stand the redeemed and sing the song of Moses and the Lamb.

Suggestive Questions and Topics.

1. Give an account of the plagues of Egypt and of the natural causes involved in them.
2. Why did Egypt want to keep the Israelites in the land?
3. Give instances of how the same agencies work for the righteous and against the wicked.
4. How could the same justice of God deliver the Israelites and drown the Egyptians?
5. Give instances of other great crossings in history.

LESSON V.—FEBRUARY 3

WHAT ISRAEL LEARNED AT SINAI

The Foundation of Israel's Life

Golden Text: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. Duet. 6:5.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 95:1-7.

Lesson Material: Exodus 19:1—24: 8; Leviticus 19; Duet. 4:32-40.

Lesson Text: Deuteronomy 4:32–40

32 For ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and *ask* from the one side of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been *any such thing* as this great thing *is*, or hath been heard like it?
33 Did *ever* people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live?
34 Or hath God assayed to go *and* take him a nation from the midst of *another* nation, by temptations, by signs, and by wonders, and by war, and by a mighty hand, and by a stretched out arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?
35 Unto thee it was shewed, that thou mightest know that the LORD he *is* God; *there is* none else beside him.
36 Out of heaven he made thee to hear his voice, that he might instruct thee: and upon earth he shewed thee his great fire; and thou heardest his words out of the midst of the fire.
37 And because he loved thy fathers, therefore he chose their seed after them, and brought thee out in his sight with his mighty power out of Egypt;
38 To drive out nations from before thee greater and mightier than thou *art*, to bring thee in, to give thee their land *for* an inheritance, as *it is* this day.
39 Know therefore this day, and consider *it* in thine heart, that the LORD he *is* God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: *there is* none else.
40 Thou shalt keep therefore his statutes, and his commandments, which I command thee this day, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, and that thou mayest prolong *thy* days upon the earth, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, for ever.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. A Bold Challenge.
2. A Unique Nation.
3. The One True God.
4. The Divine Motive of Love.
5. Keeping the Commandments.

From the memorable exodus out of Egypt the people of Israel, then a horde of bondmen three millions in number, marched straight to Mount Sinai and under its shadow pitched their tents and there dwelt for a year. This sombre mass of granite far out in the desert, without vegetation and striated with ribbons of metal, a region of wild and awful solitude, is yet one of the most sacred and famous mountains in the world and in moral magnitude overtops the Alps.

Into the short year spent here by the Israelites were crowded events that are still pulsing in the life of the world.

On the top of this mountain stood Moses, one of the tallest figures in history, receiving divine revelations and looking down on future ages and framing laws that are now wrought into the foundations of our twentieth century civilization.

On the top of this mountain the Bible was born; for here on tablets of stone were given the Ten Commandments which are the germ of this holy Book.

At the foot of this mountain the people of Israel were organized into a nation and church, and the roots of Jewish and Christian faith run back to this place. From this mountain the Israelites started out on their wanderings of forty years through the wilderness to the promised land.

When near the border of this land Moses delivered the farewell discourses recorded in Deuteronomy in which he reviewed the history of the chosen people and gave his final admonitions.

1. A Bold Challenge

Moses opens his discourse at this point with a bold challenge. "For ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from the one side of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it? Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live?" The reference is to the descent of the Lord upon Sinai in fire when "the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly." (Exodus 19:18).

The challenge is to produce any other revelation like it. Let the whole world be searched from the creation of man and from one side of heaven to the other and can the like of it be found? Christianity makes this sweeping challenge to this day.

It is not afraid of comparison with any and all other religions. It does not shut itself up in its own sacred book and affect to ignore all others, but it demands that these books be produced and the most honest and pitiless comparison be made.

If any other religion can produce a better book, bearing upon it more evident and convincing proofs of divine inspiration and showing better fruits in its influence in the world, Christianity stands ready to acknowledge and accept such a book.

Comparative religion is a field of study that is now being widely investigated by Christian scholars and there are courses in this study in many of our theological schools. These other sacred books do reveal much truth and light that are often good and beautiful; but they are also mixed with such superstition and immorality that at best they are only dim and broken lights of God and can bear no comparison with the Bible of Christianity.

We are still not afraid of but welcome such comparison and we still boldly challenge the whole world to produce any book that as a revelation of religious truth can be placed in the same class with the Word of God.

2. A Unique Nation

The challenge raises another point on which it is equally bold. "Or hath God essayed to go and take him a nation from the midst of another nation, by temptations, by signs, and by wonders, and by war, and by a mighty hand, and by a stretched out arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the Lord your God promised in Egypt before your eyes?"

According to the almost unanimous consent of history this challenge stands unanswered and it is literally true, their "enemies themselves being judges," that God "hath not dealt so with any nation."

The Hebrew people stand out upon all the pages of history as a unique race with an unparalleled history. Called out of ancient Babylon, a land sunk in idolatry, they were sent down into Egypt, another land of colossal idolatry, and yet through it all they were purged of this moral and spiritual degradation and taught and trained in the knowledge of the one true and living God and kept as a seed of pure religion for all the world.

They came out of this checkered, strange and tragic history with their very faces stamped with a peculiar physiognomy that thousands of years of wanderings and persecutions and sufferings in all lands have not been able to obliterate. It stands out on ancient Babylonian and Egyptian and Roman monuments, and whatever blood courses in their veins, Greek or Russian, English or Chinese, the Hebrew features persist and are indelible.

And this physical constitution is matched with a spiritual endowment that has been unequalled by any other people.

As the Greeks were gifted with intellectual and esthetic genius, and the Romans with a genius for law and administration, so were the Hebrews endowed with a spiritual sensitivity that brought them near to God and made them receptive of his divine breath and life more than any other people.

What other nation has God in the whole providence of history so called out from the midst of other nations and made them such a peculiar people?

This challenge of Moses also stands unanswered.

3. The One True God

But what was the objective and end of all this special revelation and training? "Unto thee it was showed, that thou mightest know that the Lord he is God; there is none else beside him. So important is this point that Moses returns to it a little later and admonishes the people, "Know therefore this day, and consider in thine heart, that the Lord he is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: there is none else."

The whole history from Abraham to Moses and onward was to rescue this truth from the sea of polytheism and idolatry in which it was sunk and put it on a rock and mountain summit where it would stand revealed and secure through all the coming ages.

We are so far removed from polytheism and so little acquainted with its practical results that we can hardly imagine what fatal error and deep and inevitable degradation it is.

A multiplicity of gods instantly dethrones the one supreme God and drags him down to the level of men and beasts and dumb images of wood and stone and identifies him with all things unclean and grossly immoral.

We can see its work in such countries as India where all things are gods except God himself and the lines between the true and the false, and the pure and the vile, are obliterated.

It took tremendous efforts and terrible lessons and ages of education to get this fatal error out of the minds and hearts of the Hebrew people, but it was finally washed and burnt out of them, and they have stood down to our day for a monotheism that is a rock of ages in our world.

We still need to keep our vision fixed on this polestar of truth in the moral and spiritual heavens and let no theoretical error or practical creed crowd God out of his central and supreme and solitary place in our faith and worship.

4. The Divine Motive of Love

But why was Jehovah so intent upon calling out the Hebrew people and training them in the knowledge of the one true and living God? "Because he loved thy fathers, therefore he chose their seed after them, and brought thee out in his sight with his mighty power out of Egypt."

Love was the divine fountain out of which this stream flowed that was destined to overflow the world.

It is difficult for us to grasp and believe this truth so that it lays hold of us as a central fact and motive in all our thought and action. So often has it been represented that God in all his relations with the world has been governed only or chiefly by a sense of justice and retribution, or even of hostility and hatred, that it lingers in our minds that he is unfriendly to us and that it is a terrible thing to fall into his hands.

Of course there is a degree of truth in this view, for God never violates his own laws and sense of perfect justice, but the central truth and fundamental fact about him is that "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (I John 1:5).

Back of the whole Bible and the whole course of the divine providence from the beginning of the creation is the sublime fact and motive, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

And so God is love down to the last fibre of his being or attribute of his nature, and his whole objective and purpose in creation and providence and redemption is to show us his love and lead us into the full knowledge and reception and enjoyment of it.

God is never unfriendly, even to a sinner. His very justice is another side and form of his love and is intended to lead his errant human children into his love and fellowship.

The most grievous aspect and sharpest point and stab of our sin is that it wounds our Father's heart of love.

5. Keeping the Commandments

The logic of Moses now comes to a very practical application and conclusion. "Thou shalt keep therefore his statutes, and his commandments which I command thee this day, and with thy children after thee, that thou mayest prolong thy days upon the earth, which the Lord thy God giveth thee, for ever."

The commandments are to be kept, not because they are the arbitrary requirements and restrictions of a despotic ruler, or simply to please his will, but because they are the laws of life growing out of our very constitution, and are therefore the necessary conditions of our life itself.

We are still inclined at times to think or feel that the divine commandments are harsh impediments and fetters which, were they broken and removed, would let us out into larger and sweeter liberty. But this is like supposing that a locomotive would have more liberty if it were to jump the track, or a bird if it were released from the medium and friction of the air.

The commandments of God are the steel track on which we can drive ourselves with speed and safety to life more abundant, and they are the medium in which we can soar into the widest and freest liberty.

We are guilty of the blindest folly when we think that the commandments of God are in any way or degree unfriendly to our highest good, and only in keeping of them is there great reward.

Suggestive Questions and Topics.

1. Give some account of the events that took place at Sinai.
2. What were some of the events that happened between the departure from Sinai and the entrance into Canaan?
3. Give an account of some of the other sacred books of the world, and state how they compare with the Bible.
4. In what ways has God made us a peculiar nation?
5. Why is belief in one God so important in our religious faith?
6. What is the relation of divine law to human liberty?

LESSON VI.—FEBRUARY 10

THE FAILURE AT KADESH

The Crisis at Kadesh

Golden Text: The Lord is with us: fear them not. Numbers 14:9.

Devotional Reading: Romans 8:31-39.

Lesson Material: Numbers 13:17—14:45; Deut. 1: 26-40.

Lesson Text: Numbers 14:1–10

And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night.
2 And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness!
3 And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt?
4 And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.
5 Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel.
6 ¶ And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, *which were* of them that searched the land, rent their clothes:
7 And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, *is* an exceeding good land.
8 If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey.
9 Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they *are* bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD *is* with us: fear them not.
10 But all the congregation bade stone them with stones. And the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. Weeping Cowards.

2. Bewailing Their Misfortunes.

3. Turning Against Their Leaders.

4. Brave Words from the Leaders.

5. A Minority with God Is a Majority.

At the border of the promised land an exploring committee of twelve men were sent into the country to investigate it and report.

As usual the committee divided and brought back majority and minority reports.

The minority report, signed by two immortal names, those of Joshua, and Caleb said, "Let us go up at once and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it" (13:30).

The majority report, whose names remain practically unknown to us, exploited the giants in the land and raised tremendous fears in the people and declared, "We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we."

All the arts of the demagogue were ingeniously embodied in this majority report.

It played mightily upon the fears of weak men and timid women and paraded and magnified the formidable sons of Anak.

As the children of Israel looked northward their imagination could see the land swarming with giants, and they forgot God.

1. Weeping Cowards

Instantly the camp became a scene of confusion and panic. "And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night."

What weeping cowards they were!

All their recent experience of deliverance from Egypt and thrilling revelation at Sinai and of the great promises of God backed up by his mighty hand vanished from their consciousness, and all they could think of were the terrible children of Anak and all the inhabitants of the land with great swelling names of terror, Amalekites and Hittites and Amorites and Canaanites, "men of great stature."

A violent wave of emotionalism swept over the camp and submerged their faith in a sea of fear. It was a case of " mob psychol-

ogy " that is so potent with a crowd when it infects them with its germ and sweeps them off in mad panic.

We are highly contagious beings and catch from one another our fears, and then our reason may be quickly dethroned and we are but leaves in the wind and storm of passion.

However, too much should not have been expected of these people.

They were only recently delivered from generations of bondage in Egypt and had not yet outgrown the slave psychology of timidity and fear.

They did not have back of them and in them hereditary blood that was saturated with the spirit of independence and courage. What we are and do in any crisis depends on what we have been and done back through our whole lives. The oak withstands the storm because it is deeply rooted down in the rocks through the growth of a hundred years.

England stands so strong and immovable today because of its many centuries of solid growth.

Our country is growing roots of independence and courage that will keep it secure in the future, and we must develop such individual character if we are to stand in the hour of trial.

2. Bewailing Their Misfortunes

The panic-stricken people now saw their past through a colored lens that instantly changed its whole character. They had been abject and miserable enough in Egypt where they writhed under the lash of their taskmasters and cried to God for deliverance, but now they imagined they wanted to go back into that bondage.

"Were it not better for us to return into Egypt?" Death in the wilderness, they declared, would be better than that they should be brought into this terrible land to perish by the sword.

Marvelous is the effect of our subjective consciousness in coloring and determining our view of things and of our whole experience. We see things not only as they are but also as we are.

When our own minds are saturated or tinctured with our own imaginings they impart their own color to all we see.

This is the deepest cause of optimism and of pessimism, the one looking at the world through its own gloomy spirit, and the other viewing it through its courage and hope. Pessimism fastens its gaze on and laments the mud out of which the rose grows, but optimism sees and enjoys the rose growing out of the mud, and the two points of view of the same fact make the difference.

If we look at our misfortunes through our fears and disappointments we can grow sour and bitter and weep cowardly tears and bewail our fate that we have been brought out into a wilderness to perish; but if we look at our trials through our faith and courage and resolution to go forward out of the wilderness, we shall forget Egypt and win the promised land.

3. Turning Against Their Leaders

What was the next thing that these cowardly people did? Turned against their leaders. They rebelled against Moses and Aaron and blamed the whole bad business upon them. "And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.

What brave words these be! How often has this very thing been attempted in the hour of danger and threatened disaster.

Did not the cowardly sailors on the ship threaten to throw Columbus overboard and did they not actually bring him back in chains? How often has the popular leader of one day become the object of popular rage on the next? Has not almost every generation stoned its own prophets and left the next generation to build their magnificent tombs?

Lincoln drank this bitter cup of popular resentment and violent personal abuse in the dark days of the Civil War, and nearly all our great leaders have at one time or another experienced the same unjust and cruel fate.

It takes the court of the ages to do great men justice.

The prophets and pioneers of the race have generally had a hard road to travel. Out of the death cell in Athens in which Socrates was condemned to drink the cup of poison issued words of wisdom that still inspire the world. The great supreme illustration of this truth is Calvary. Christ was crushed on his cross, his own people would have none of his leadership, but the

ages have set him in a mighty framework in which he is revealed as the Master of life and of death and as the Light of the world.

Let us learn to be patient with our leaders and not turn upon them in a violent reaction of distrust and rejection when some stress of trial comes.

We are at times disposed to declare, "Let us make us a captain," when we would change captains at our peril and the captain of our sudden making would likely prove utterly incompetent and plunge us into disaster, and the course for us to pursue is to follow the captain we have.

4. Brave Words from the Leaders

The rejected leaders, Moses and Aaron, and Joshua and Caleb, now took measures to still the panic and put some courage into the people. They prostrated themselves before the people and rent their clothes, not in weakness and fear of the people, but as expressive signs of the great crisis that was now upon them.

A calm and brave speech was now delivered to the people by Joshua and Caleb, the signers of the minority report, who spoke out of first-hand knowledge of the situation.

They first pictured the attractive features of the land. "The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land," even "a land flowing with milk and honey."

This was good psychology and an appealing argument to offset the people's fears.

These leaders brought into play "the expulsive power of a new affection." The way to crowd evil out is to crowd good in. All forms of faith cure now emphasize the power of the suggestion of health as a counteraction to disease.

We tend to become what we think we are, and thus a chief cure of many forms of disease, especially mental ailments, is just the belief that we are well.

Joshua and Caleb sought to plant in the minds of these people the belief in the land as an exceedingly fruitful one and thus to quell and kill their fears.

Then they hitched their cause to the star of the Lord's delight and will. "If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land." Jehovah was still their God whose mighty works in the past were a pledge of his power and will to bless them in the present, and the motive now kindled in their minds was the thought, "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

Finally these leaders appealed to the people by showing them the real nature of their fear as rebellion against God and assured them of the presence of the Lord against their enemies: "their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not."

Is not this the greatest thought and motive that can guide and inspire us.

If we can only vividly realize the presence of God with us in the path of duty, can any fear or failure turn us back?

"But all the congregation bade stone them with stones."

Joshua and Caleb fared no better than Moses and Aaron.

Let us not be surprised and angered if at times stones are hurled at us, even when we are doing our best, as though some strange thing happened unto us, for this has been the common fate of prophets and of the best people of the world (I Peter 4:12-13).

5. A Minority with God Is a Majority

"And the glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel." This blaze of fire in the tabernacle may be taken as a sign of the divine approval of the course of Moses and Aaron, and Joshua and Caleb, and was followed with an expression of the displeasure of God with the disobedient people.

In this case the majority was wrong, and the minority was right and in the end they won their cause.

This is what comes of magnifying our fears and minimizing our resources and forgetting God. This is what comes of putting our trust in material force rather than in spiritual power.

This is what may come of trusting in majorities. A majority vote is a rough means for a practical end which we must often use, but it is an untrustworthy means of reaching truth and duty and can never usurp the place of individual judgment and conscience.

Most of the errors and wrongs of the world have, at one time or another, had upon them the seal of a majority vote. The great truths of the world have at first generally been voted down.

Barabbas got more votes than Christ and can still often get a majority. Majorities may be wrong, and it is sometimes our duty to resist them.

But it is also generally our duty to submit to the majority in practical lines of action where conscience does not forbid.

Caleb and Joshua lost their case that day, but they bided their time and won their cause in the end. The minority of one generation is often the majority of the next.

A minority with God is a majority.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. Give an account of the exploration of Canaan and the reports of the investigating committee.
2. What is crowd psychology and what are its dangers?
3. Give instances of great leaders that have been turned against by their followers.
4. What arguments may we use to quiet fears and beget faith and courage in entering the Christian life?
5. When should we go with a majority and when with a minority?

LESSON VII.—FEBRUARY 17

JOSHUA AND THE CONQUEST OF CANAAN

Joshua and the Conquest of Canaan

Golden Text: Not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you. Joshua 23:14.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 47.

Lesson Material: Joshua 1—11; 23—24.

Lesson Text: Joshua 1:1–9; 23:1–3

Now after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, it came to pass, that the LORD spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying,
2 Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, *even* to the children of Israel.
3 Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses.
4 From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast.
5 There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, *so* I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.
6 Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them.
7 Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it *to* the right hand or *to* the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest.
8 This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.
9 Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God *is* with thee whithersoever thou goest.

And it came to pass, a long time after that the LORD had given rest unto Israel from all their enemies round about, that Joshua waxed old *and* stricken in age.
2 And Joshua called for all Israel, *and* for their elders, and for their heads, and for their judges, and for their officers, and said unto them, I am old *and* stricken in age:
3 And ye have seen all that the LORD your God hath done unto all these nations because of you; for the LORD your God *is* he that hath fought for you.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. After Moses.

2. Foot-print Ownership.
3. As with Moses, so with Joshua.
4. A Bugle Blast.
5. The Book of the Law.
6. Joshua's Farewell.

Exit Moses, enter Joshua. The leaders pass, but the work goes on. Joshua first appears as commander of the army of Israel against the Amalekites soon after the exodus. He was one of the explorers sent out to view the land and one of the immortal two that signed the minority report favoring immediate entrance.

As he died at the age of a hundred and ten and it is thought by the Jews that he was twenty-seven years in Canaan, he was eighty-three when he succeeded Moses.

The dead line of old age was not then placed at forty, and men were in their prime at eighty. Old men still rule the world.

1. After Moses

"Now after the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, it came to pass"—what could we expect after the death of Moses?

Can anything of importance go on after the loss of so great a leader?

Will not things come to a standstill at the edge of this great gap in providence? Shall there not be weeping and mourning and utter despair and paralysis? How reads the record?

"Now it came to pass after the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, that the Lord spake unto Joshua."

Moses was dead, but the Lord was still alive and immediately he had another leader whom he put in Moses' place.

The greatest man may drop out of the world, and it will roll on as little affected as by the fall of a snowflake into the sea. No human death can cut a gap in God's plan and providence, and he will ever move on in his plan and purpose as the stars in their courses.

The Lord said unto Joshua, "Moses my servant is dead: now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people."

Instead of despair and paralysis after the death of Moses, there was to be action, progress, conquest and victory.

A new leader was to the front, and new aims and ideals rose as stars on the horizon to lure the people on. Weeping was to give way to working, all the people were to arise and gird themselves for action, and a new spirit of enterprise and courage was to sweep them forward.

When we have experienced a loss and sorrow, whether of some trusted public leader or in our private lives, when a sudden break has interrupted our plan, let us not give way to discouragement and despair, but arise with our most strenuous endeavor and press on to greater things.

2. Foot-print Ownership

What was the promise made to Joshua and the people? Go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel."

This was an old promise that had been a long time on the way to its fulfilment, but now its hour was come. It had been a painful path over which they had traveled to it, but the promise was worth all it cost.

Yet there was one final condition that must be fulfilled: "Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses."

The land was not given to them without effort on their part, but they had to go into it and go through it and possess it by conquering it.

They could not simply wave their hand over it and quote the Lord's promise and claim it, but they had to put their feet down upon every acre of it and stamp it with the seal of their own foot-prints.

Is it not so with all the Lord's promises? They are not magical wands that we can wave and get whatever we want, but they are guides and incentives to action, paths over which we must travel, battle lines that lead to victory.

When we would possess any promised land, health, education, business success, moral and spiritual attainment, we shall get only so much of it as we have possessed with our feet and made our own by right of conquest and victory. The Lord's promises are not a means to laziness, but an incentive to action.

3. As with Moses, so with Joshua

What assurance did the people of Israel have that they would be able to take the land? "There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee."

As with Moses, so with thee—this was the ground of assurance the Israelites had that they would succeed.

The Lord could do nothing better than quote himself and thus appeal to his own faithfulness.

He would deal with Joshua as he had with Moses, and this was enough for Joshua to know to assure him of victory. Moses was not a favorite of the Lord, receiving divine guidance and help that others could not obtain, but Joshua had equal favor with God and could claim and receive the same help. The Lord did not exhaust himself with Moses, but still had unbounded stores of grace for others.

Divine help was not restricted to Moses and his day, but was continued unspent and undiminished to the next generation and has extended in the same fulness down to our day. We are not to think that the grace of God was bestowed upon ancient prophets and apostles with a copiousness and directness that are denied to us.

Religion did not all happen in the past. We still live and move and have our being in God, and he is still our very present help in trouble. As God was with Moses and David and John and Paul, so will he be with us.

In his name and under his guidance, filled with his Spirit and might, we also can go forward to possess new lands of promise, and there shall not any man be able to stand before us all the days of our life.

4. A Bugle Blast

A bugle blast now rang in the ears of Joshua: "Be strong and of good

courage. . . . Only be strong and very courageous . . . according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayst prosper whithersoever thou goest."

Divine promise and presence and power do not dispense with human courage.

The path of victory having been pointed out to Joshua, he had to put on his armor and march forward with bravery that could not be frightened or turned back.

Courage means heart. It is the spirit that nerves a man when his heart is in his work and nothing can stop him. Difficulties and dangers only urge him forward with increased determination.

Joshua was to face walled cities and serried ranks, but he was a dauntless soldier, and victory was his.

To face an unfriendly and scoffing world, to stand up against godless companions, to do the right when the wrong seems easier and more popular and profitable, to overcome temptation and keep one's self unspotted from the world—this is a battle that often tries the mettle of the bravest heart.

Yet Joshua's courage was to be confined strictly within the limits of the law. He was not to be rash and reckless and run wildly along any path, but he was to keep in the narrow way of righteousness and turn not to the right hand or the left.

There is a kind of daring and dashing bravery that has no respect or regard for anything, and will as soon ally itself with the wrong as with the right.

But true courage keeps within the control of conscience. It is fearless in the right, but it fears to do wrong.

5. The Book of the Law

The law was not left to the personal opinion of Joshua, but was put in writing and thus assumed a definite and permanent form. "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein."

The "book" that was first mentioned in Exodus 17:14 here appears and henceforth plays an increasing part in the story of redemption.

The book here spoken of was the germ that grew into the Bible, the most wonderful book in all the world, the ripest, richest seed of wisdom that ever has been cast into the soil of humanity and that is causing it to bloom and bear the finest fruits of life.

The law is written in this book after the manner of our written constitutions, and so the law is not a changeful thing, subject to the ephemeral opinion and prejudice of every passing generation, but it has a fixed form and embodies principles that endure like the granite rocks that underlie soil and fruits.

While interpretation and applications change, substance and spirit abide. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but not one jot or tittle of this law shall fail.

Joshua was not to let this law depart out of his mouth, but he was to meditate upon it day and night that he might observe it.

It is not enough simply to read the law or even to know it, but one must mark it and brood over it so as to absorb it into his spirit.

Meditation is the secret of mastering the law. This is the mental and spiritual process by which we think our way into the depths of the Word of God until we are seized with its thought and saturated with its spirit.

When they are so absorbed and assimilated these words "are spirit, and they are life."

Joshua immediately began to do his part in carrying out this divine promise and program. As commander-in-chief he issued "General Order No 1," directing the officers to pass through the camp, saying, "Prepare you victuals; for within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land, which the Lord your God giveth you to possess it." (1:11).

This order has in it the accent of conviction and breathes the spirit of assured victory. There is no hesitation or halting in it, no provision for

retreat or possibility of failure in it, but only decisive action and sure possession of the land.

Having received our general orders and specific commandments from the great Captain of our salvation, immediate and bold action is our duty.

Some promised land is always lying before us: it may be education, or special training, or some service, or whatever it may be; and we should straightway pass over our Jordan and possess it.

6. Joshua's Farewell

"And it came to pass, a long time after that the Lord had given rest unto Israel from all their enemies round about, that Joshua waxed old and stricken in age."

So runs the round and closes the record of every life.

However great the leader and splendid his achievement, however many enemies he has vanquished, there is no discharge in this last war. The eye grows dim and the strength waxes weak and death closes the record. Joshua assembled the people and delivered unto them his farewell.

He had no new message to give them, but only the old message reiterated and strengthened. Still would he have them be courageous and keep all the words of the law (23:6).

So should we live that when we come to the final scene we shall not have to reverse or revise any of our teaching, but only give it new and stronger emphasis.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. Give instances of how the work has gone on after great leaders in the church and state and world have passed away.
2. Show how we may gain possession of things by foot-print seals.
3. In what ways is God with us as he was with Moses and Joshua?
4. What calls to action are addressed to us in the Bible?
5. What is the value of written constitutions?
6. Give some notable farewells of other great leaders.

LESSON VIII.—FEBRUARY 24

THE PERIOD OF THE JUDGES

The Long Struggle with Idolatry

Golden Text: I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely. Amos 14:4.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 32:1-7.

Lesson Material: Judges 2—16.

Lesson Text: Judges 2:16–18; 7:2–8

16 ¶ Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them.
17 And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the LORD; *but* they did not so.
18 And when the LORD raised them up judges, then the LORD was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for it repented the LORD because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them.

2 And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people that *are* with thee *are* too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me.
3 Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever *is* fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand.
4 And the LORD said unto Gideon, The people *are* yet *too* many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there: and it shall be, *that* of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go.
5 So he brought down the people unto the water: and the LORD said unto Gideon, Every one that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink.
6 And the number of them that lapped, *putting* their hand to their mouth, were three hundred men: but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water.
7 And the LORD said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the *other* people go every man unto his place.
8 So the people took victuals in their hand, and their trumpets: and he sent all *the rest of* Israel every man unto his tent, and retained those three hundred men: and the host of Midian was beneath him in the valley.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. Judges.
2. Enter Gideon.

3. Sifting Out the True Soldiers.
4. Strange Weapons.
5. A Startling Attack.
6. Victory.

The Book of Judges covers about 280 years from the death of Joshua to the birth of Samuel.

It is not a continuous history, but rather groups of incidents designed to illustrate the development and progress of the chosen people.

The period was a rough time of disorder and guerilla warfare such as usually follows the subjection of a country by an invading race, as in the conquest of England by the Saxons and later by the Normans, and the occupation of this continent by English colonists. The thrusting out of one race by another is generally a protracted agony of strife and blood.

Yet divine providence plays as direct and important a part in such periods as in the piping times of peace.
God is in the storm and not less than in the sunshine.

This Book shows us that barbarian elements enter into the sacred history and that there are rough stones in the foundation of our Christian civilization.

The Book is intensely interesting as it contains dramatic scenes and tragic events and is full of the red blood of primitive life.

1. Judges

The period of the Judges was the time during which the twelve tribes of Israel were only a loose confederation that had not yet been welded into national unity, and it corresponds very closely with our colonial history when the thirteen colonies were only laxly held together and were more or less independent of one another.

There was no central government and power to bind and compact the various districts and people into law and order. Lawlessness abounded and primitive means and modes of justice prevailed. It was the raw crude

formative time of Israel when its divergent elements were being slowly molded into unity and harmony.

More than once we are told that "In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (17:6, 18:1). It was therefore a time when individual ability and valor counted for much and men rose to leadership on the steps of valiant deeds done.

Such a man rising by some heroic action or victory over tribal invasion became known as a Judge and ruled in his tribe or district by virtue of his personal prowess and authority.

Twelve of these are mentioned in the Book from Othniel to Samson, besides Eli and Samuel who judged in Israel but are not included in this class. They were not successive, but some of them were contemporaneous, and each had his own district. They were regarded as divinely raised up for their work and were representatives and servants of God, though some of them were men of rough character with bloody hands.

Our acquaintance with this period in the history and education of the chosen people should enable us to see the presence of God in other times and in conditions very different from our own and should make us patient with people who are in a lower stage of development and enlightenment as compared with ourselves.

2. Enter Gideon

Two hundred years have passed since the death of Joshua, during which the people of Israel have been passing through checkered scenes and reaping the mingled fruits of faithfulness and disobedience. There have been repeated apostacies, followed by penal oppressions, and Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah and Barak, Samson and other Judges have arisen and thrown off the yoke of pagan bondage.

At last the Midianites, a confederation of the people of the East, crossed the Jordan into the plain of Esdraelon, a hundred and thirty-five thousand in number (8:10) and lighted like grasshoppers on the rich valleys and fruitful fields, devouring the land and driving the Israelites into the mountains and caves.

Idolatry had again worked corruption and brought judgment, and it was one of the darkest hours Israel ever saw.

At this point enters Gideon, one of the heroic figures of these pages, for God always has a man ready for the hour.

An angel of the Lord found him at his daily work, where so often men called to high places are found, and commissioned him to go and smite the Midianites.

Like Moses, Gideon shrank from the task in self-distrust, but, having been assured by special signs, he began the work of religious reform and revival that very night by throwing down the image of Baal in his own town.

He then blew the trumpet and gathered an army and stole in upon the Midianites as they lay in the valley under the hill of Moreh.

3. Sifting Out the True Soldiers

Gideon found himself with thirty-two thousand men hastily hurried together in an undisciplined multitude that was little better than a mob.

It would have been dangerous to enter upon a campaign with such raw material that would have been easily swept away in a panic.

Twenty-two thousand went off at the first chance and ten thousand remained and by a further process of testing and selection only three hundred brave and true men were left.

Most people are afraid.

In the presence of difficulties and dangers they are not to be depended on and they slip off and go back.

These three hundred were the solid core and measured the real fighting strength of the thirty-two thousand; the others were so much dead weight and dangerous material. It is quality that counts and not quantity.

The spiritual power and aggressive force of the church are measured by the few that stand every test of faithfulness and service and not by the many whose connection with the church is only nominal.

No man, having put his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

The activity of Gideon's camp was along the line of organization and preparation. The three hundred were divided into three companies. The bravest men are powerless and easily overcome when disorganized.

Organization combines and compacts their strength into unity and might. Many a church is weak because its work is not divided up and every one given something to do, and the secret of the strength and fruitfulness of many a church is wise organization.

4. Strange Weapons

Gideon armed his men with trumpets, pitchers and lamps.

His methods were novel, his weapons were unique.

He struck out into new paths and dared to do something that had never been done before. He did not say the old weapons were good enough and prefer defeat with the old to victory with new ones; but he studied the situation and adapted his methods to the needs of the hour.

There is always a call in the church for the man that can see the demands of the situation and can fashion new weapons.

The church is too often using old weapons that are out of date; its fortresses and guns sometimes front the errors of a past age, but not the errors of today. Methods of Christian work once good may no longer fit the circumstances.

Nowhere is there more room and greater need for genius and invention than in devising and forging effective weapons in the warfare against sin today.

Yet Gideon in adopting new weapons did not discard the old and well-tried sword, and new methods in the Lord's service must never drop the old and ever-faithful sword of the Spirit.

5. A Startling Attack

At midnight the three companies of a hundred men each stretched themselves out into a circle around the camp of the sleeping Midianites. Each

man held his burning torch concealed in his pitcher in his left hand and in his right hand his trumpet.

The ring of soldiers thus stood around the beleaguered camp as dark and silent as the night itself.

At the signal of Gideon every man blew his trumpet and smashed his pitcher. Suddenly and simultaneously three hundred blasts split the air, startling the unsuspecting Midianites out of their sleep, and three hundred torches blazed out upon the midnight, encircling the camp in a ring of fire. It was only the captain of a company of soldiers that ordinarily blew a trumpet and carried a light.

The three hundred trumpets and torches thus produced upon the Midianites the effect of three hundred companies, and they awoke out of their sleep to suppose themselves surrounded with an overwhelming force of Israelites.

This was the strategy of war, but there was no untruth in it—for Gideon's men did not blow any trumpets and wave any torches that they did not have.

At the same time that they blew their trumpets and uncovered their torches they raised their battle shout, "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon!"

They thus proclaimed themselves the soldiers of God as well as of Gideon. It was a religious war they were waging.

They were not after plunder or conquest, but they struck for God and their homeland. They were seeking deliverance, not only from pagan invasion and oppression, but also from heathen idolatry and corruption. The war was a great religious revival.

War is sometimes wrong on both sides and it is always wrong on one side, but sometimes it is right and a religious duty on the side of liberty and truth.

We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual hosts of wickedness: wherefore we should put on the whole armor

of God and wield the sword of the Spirit and quit ourselves like men as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

6. Victory

The effect of the strange attack was instantaneous and tremendous. The breaking of the jars, the outflashing of the torches, the blare of the trumpets, the shouting of the soldiers, the terrible names of Gideon and of the Lord, awoke the camp into a panic of confusion and fear and flight.

All the host ran, in the mad rush trampling one another down and falling upon their own swords.

Gideon and his band, now joined by an increasing number of Israelites who flocked to his side out of their hiding places—for there are always plenty of brave men after the victory has been won—pursued the flying horde across the Jordan and exterminated the last remnant of them among their own hills.

A great enemy of Israel was wiped off the earth that day and appears in history no more: three hundred brave men did it.

Here is what an insignificant minority inspired by the right can do against a big majority that is in the wrong. In such a battle, though at first the minority may seem overwhelmed, yet in the end one shall chase a thousand and two put ten thousand to flight.

In the great battle that is raging around us today, we are to fight as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

At last Satan shall fall like lightning from heaven, and the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of our God and his Christ.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. Draw a parallel between the times of the Judges in Israel and the colonial times in our own history.
2. Describe the situation in Israel in the days of Gideon.
3. Explain the tests that Gideon used in sifting out the true soldiers.
4. What are some new weapons and methods we may use in the war against evil today?
5. Give other instances in which a brave minority won the final victory.

LESSON IX.—MARCH 2

THE REVIVAL UNDER SAMUEL

The Revival under Samuel

Golden Text: Prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only. I Samuel 7:3.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 51:1-10.

Lesson Material: I Samuel 1—7.

Lesson Text: I Samuel 7:5–13

5 And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the LORD.
6 And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured *it* out before the LORD, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the LORD. And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh.
7 And when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel were gathered together to Mizpeh, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard *it*, they were afraid of the Philistines.
8 And the children of Israel said to Samuel, Cease not to cry unto the LORD our God for us, that he will save us out of the land of the Philistines.
9 ¶ And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered *it for* a burnt offering wholly unto the LORD: and Samuel cried unto the LORD for Israel; and the LORD heard him.
10 And as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel: but the LORD thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel.
11 And the men of Israel went out of Mizpeh, and pursued the Philistines, and smote them, until *they came* under Bethcar.
12 Then Samuel took a stone, and set *it* between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Eben-ezer, saying, Hitherto hath the LORD helped us.
13 ¶ So the Philistines were subdued, and they came no more into the coast of Israel: and the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. A National Assembly.
2. National Repentance.
3. The Philistines Aroused.
4. The Battle.
5. Ebenezer.

Exit Gideon and enter Samuel. He appears upon the scene as a boy, a child of promise of pious parents, who was brought up under the aged Eli at the tabernacle. He witnessed the tragic downfall and death of Eli's corrupt sons and then of the aged priest and was soon recognized himself as a prophet and judge.

The Philistines, a powerful people of ancient lineage and culture, were neighbors to the Israelites on the west, occupying the rich plain lying between Israel and the sea. Already they had invaded Israel and captured the ark (4:1-22), which was then soon restored.

The Philistines were still plaguing and oppressing the Israelites, and dark days of idolatry and corruption were settling down upon the chosen people when Samuel appeared as judge and prophet.

The theocracy was now proving ineffectual and breaking up, and Samuel instituted great reforms and bridged the way from the theocracy over into the monarchy.

1. A National Assembly

At the call of Samuel there was a national assembly of the people at Mizpeh. The form of government, while it was a theocracy, was also a pure democracy in which all the people had a part.

The completest divine subjection coincides with the widest human liberty, and the Bible has always promoted popular government.

The power of association and discussion is illustrated in this national convention. Not much can be done with people while they are scattered and to bring them under the conviction and motives of common ideas and inspire them with contagious enthusiasm they must be got together.

The numerous and multiplying conventions that gather in the interest of all kinds of objects show this need and power. Scatter the embers and the fire dies out; heap them together and it burns and glows. There is heat in a compact audience; numbers are magnetic.

Equally effective is association in religious work. Adding ourselves together multiplies our strength. Power increases in geometrical ratio to numbers.

God can pour more of his Spirit upon a thousand people than upon a hundred.

Revival instantly shows itself in increased attendance and attention. On the day of Pentecost the disciples and Christians were all with one accord in one place. By the simple process of assembling ourselves together we can invite and compel the presence of the Spirit.

The primary purpose of this assembly was for prayer. The country was in a bad state, but the people did not meet simply to talk about that and pass resolutions laying the blame on the government and demanding a change of administration. They were not looking earthward but heavenward.

We begin at the right place when we gather for prayer, for if we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all things else shall be added unto us and life will right itself at every point.

2. National Repentance

Samuel prayed and the people repented and confessed, "We have sinned against the Lord."

It is rare that we find a nation even mildly admitting that it has done wrong.

A nation generally boasts of its policy, however questionable and even flagrant its course has been, and will defend its most unjustifiable acts. Witness the present self-justification and recriminations of all the nations involved in the Great War, especially of Germany which is loudest of all in proclaiming its innocence and purity.

But here was a people gathered in national assembly that were stricken with a sense of guilt and openly confessed their sin.

Penitence is the first condition of pardon. No one ever gets any better that thinks he is without fault and already perfect.

The first step towards the right is to know that we are in the wrong. If there is anything we ought sincerely to desire it is to be delivered from self-delusion as to our true condition, whether as individuals or as a church or as a nation. It is healthful and hopeful for us to feel how bad we are. "We have sinned" is an honest and manly confession that is always the beginning of a better day. It was with this confession on his lips that the Prodigal started home. Penitence is the root of pardon, peace and power.

The people expressed and sealed their confession by means of certain signs and acts. They poured out water before the Lord and fasted. They thus put into an outward visible form what they inwardly felt. Their penitence was not kept secret in their hearts as something they were ashamed of, but it was confessed before God and men.

Repentance of which we are ashamed is repentance that needs to be repented of; and repentance that does not flow out and mold itself into some definite tangible act is likely soon to evaporate and leave no solid result. If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

3. The Philistines Aroused

The gathering of the Israelites alarmed and aroused the Philistines.

This assembly was an act of independence that might grow into rebellion, and the Philistines came up to nip it in the bud.

It was all the more dangerous because it was a religious revival, for this would call down the power of Israel's God. And thus activity among the Israelites called forth counter activity among the Philistines, and the battle was on.

Good always stirs up evil. The sun that quickens all the forces of life is equally potent in arousing the forces of death.

When Jesus went up into the wilderness, the devil hastened to the same place. When God's people fall to praying the hosts of evil are alarmed, and "Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees." Despots and bosses, whether on a king's throne or at the head of a politi-

cal party or in an ecclesiastical office, are always uneasy and alarmed when they see the people meeting to exercise their own rights.

It is bad for the liquor business and for any evil cause when a revival stirs up the church, and with every forward movement in reform vested interests will arouse their forces to resist it. The more righteousness there is in us the hotter fight we shall have against temptation and wickedness.

When we begin praying unto God and repenting of our sins we may expect a battle in which the gates of hell will come up against us.

The Israelites were afraid of the Philistines and entreated Samuel to cease not his cry unto God.

Fear is not inconsistent with bravery, and it always serves us a good purpose when it makes us conscious of our weakness and drives us to God as our refuge and strength and very present help in trouble.

4. The Battle

While Samuel was offering the burnt sacrifice the Philistines drew near, and the battle began.

Worship was turned into war, and prayer into steel and blood.

Our fathers in former days were also confronted with enemies so that they went straight out of the church into battle, and we do not appear yet to have reached the time when all our weapons can be turned into instruments of work. But we pray and work and wait for the coming of this day.

The artilleries of heaven opened fire in this contest of the chosen people with the pagan hosts. The battle on the plain below was accompanied with marshaled hosts in the clouds above from which lightnings shot their blazing bolts of fire, attended with thunder crash and roar.

The Philistines were panic stricken at the display of divine power and wrath and their doom was upon them.

God is a great God, and all power on earth and in heaven is his to work out his purposes.

Lightning flash and sunbeam, fire and flood, cosmic force and invisible microbe, leap at his bidding to interpose protection or inflict retribution. Who can contend with him? for he needs only touch some hidden spring in the mechanism of his providence and a bolt will fly up from our path or shoot down from the sky to smite us in judgment.

And as great as is his power to fight against us, so great is his power to fight for us and lead us on to victory. The same God who can strike us with unexpected and terrible retribution can also cover us with his shield and buckler and hide us in the secret of his tabernacle.

But the Lord did not do all the fighting. While he was playing his artillery upon the Philistines, "They were smitten before Israel;" the Israelites drew swords and pursued the Philistines and smote them, or there would have been no victory that day.

God fights for us and with us, but he never takes our place and dismisses us from the field. It is only when we face our temptations as good soldiers of Jesus Christ that God is with us and all things are working together for our victory.

5. Ebenezer

Thus again the Israelites were delivered and another great enemy troubled them no more. On the field of victory Samuel set up a stone and called it Ebenezer, "the stone of help," saying, "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us."

The great battlefields of our Civil War are being marked every year with numerous stones that fix the position of armies and regiments and tell the story of heroic deeds. Our victories are thus being crystallized into stone, and these monuments remain as solid witness and proof of valor that will not let the memory of these great deeds die and will inspire many generations. Other stones are being set up to mark the battlefields and epochal events of the Great War.

The kingdom of God has many fields where Ebenezers are being erected.

Every victory over error and wickedness in the history of the world and the church marks the help of the Lord; and great crises, such as the Reformation, have been signalized by his presence and power.

Our individual lives are fields that should be marked at many points with monuments of remembrance.

The victories that have come into our lives through the grace of God, the mercies that he has bestowed upon us, should not be allowed to die away in forgetfulness, but should be treasured up in thankfulness as a comfort and inspiration. The life that has many such monuments is rich and strong.

And as we look back on the Ebenezers in our lives, we know that as the Lord has helped us hitherto, so will he help us even unto the end.

The Israelites did not stop with driving the Philistines out that day, but they kept on expelling them from all the borders and coasts of their land until it was free from their enslaving and polluting presence.

Too often we do not reap the full fruit of our victory because we do not follow it up. We win one good point and then stop satisfied. We tell the truth, but do not control our temper. We are amiable on one side of our nature and irritable on another. We are polite and gracious in society, but ill-tempered and gruff in the home. We are honest in business, but uncharitable in our judgments.

Leave no city or outpost in your life in the possession of Satan, but cast down every evil imagination and bring every thought into captivity and obedience to Christ.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. Give an account of the early training and life of Samuel.
2. What part have national conventions played in our political and religious life?
3. Give instances of how reform stirs up opposition.
4. Does God still use natural forces to help us in fighting disease and all forms of evil?
5. Give account of some notable monuments that have been reared to mark civil and moral and religious victories.

LESSON X.—MARCH 9

THE REIGN OF SAUL

Lessons from Saul's Reign

Golden Text: Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice. I Sam. 15:22.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 139:1-12.

Lesson Material: I Samuel 8—15.

Lesson Text: I Samuel 15:13-23

13 And Samuel came to Saul: and Saul said unto him, Blessed *be* thou of the LORD: I have performed the commandment of the LORD.

14 And Samuel said, What *meaneth* then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?

15 And Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed.

16 Then Samuel said unto Saul, Stay, and I will tell thee what the LORD hath said to me this night. And he said unto him, Say on.

17 And Samuel said, When thou *wast* little in thine own sight, *wast* thou not *made* the head of the tribes of Israel, and the LORD anointed thee king over Israel?

18 And the LORD sent thee on a journey, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed.

19 Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the LORD, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the LORD?

20 And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and have gone the way which the LORD sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites.

21 But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the LORD thy God in Gilgal.

22 And Samuel said, Hath the LORD *as great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey *is* better than sacrifice, *and* to hearken than the fat of rams.

23 For rebellion *is as* the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness *is as* iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from *being* king.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. ***The Repentance of the Lord.***
2. ***A Hypocritical Greeting.***
3. ***A Falsehood Quickly Exposed.***
4. ***Adroit Self-exculpation.***
5. ***Obedience Better Than Sacrifice.***

Saul is now the central figure on the stage. The splendid promise of his youth and opening years as king was soon shadowed with disobedience that grew into the darkness of final ruin. He first violated divine ordinances in offering sacrifices at Gilgal.

About ten years after his inauguration as king occurred the great disobedience which is the subject of the present lesson.

On the southwestern border of Israel between Palestine and Egypt were the Amalekites, a roving band of robbers that had opposed the passage of the Israelites through the wilderness and were still vexing them with frequent predatory incursions.

At their first contact with Israel in the wilderness, God had pronounced their doom upon them: "I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven" (Ex. 17:14).

This hour had now come. Samuel gave the commandment to Saul in the name of the Lord: "Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass" (15:3).

This extreme measure reflects the rough justice of that crude time.

Over against this positive and explicit command stands this record: "But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but everything that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly" (15:9).

This is the issue: how will Saul meet it? Samuel finds Saul on his return and makes him face this record.

Saul's defence of himself is a study in conscience in which we see human character bit by bit going to pieces.

1. The Repentance of the Lord

The word of the Lord came unto Samuel, saying, "It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king."

This is a strange announcement to come from the Lord "with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."

But the rest of the statement shows us that the real turning was not in the Lord but in Saul: "for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments." Saul turned in his conduct towards the Lord from obedience to disobedience, and therefore the Lord met this changed conduct with a different aspect of his character.

When we change our relation to any object, it seems to change to us, though it may not have changed at all.

A mountain from different points of view may present such different aspects as not to be recognized as the same mountain. A railway train will carry us with speed and safety to our destination as long as we remain on it, but if we get off and stand on its track the same train, unchanged in all its laws, will crush us to death.

God cradles us in his loving providence as long as we obey him, but when we disobey him the same loving providence begins to work against us.

2. A Hypocritical Greeting

Samuel was wroth when he knew that Saul had again transgressed, and after praying all night went off to find him and call him to account. After some difficulty, for Saul appears to have kept out of the prophet's way, Samuel found the unfaithful king and was greeted with the salutation, "Blessed be thou of the Lord."

The guilty king with the spoils of disobedience in his possession receives the prophet of the Lord with this holy benediction! A guilty conscience can utter the most pious ejaculations.

Doubtless the purpose of the king was to allay the suspicions of the prophet and curry favor with him by his pious and effusive flattery. The devil himself on one occasion grew very religious and professed himself willing to worship Christ in order to win his point.

The same spirit may be lurking in us, and we must beware that we do not turn our very religion into a cloak to cover our sin.

Saul followed up his pious greeting with the bold declaration, "I have performed the commandment of the Lord."

He would hide his iniquity and forestall criticism by posing before the prophet as a faithful servant whose obedience was without flaw.

But his declaration was a falsehood. Saul had not performed the commandment of the Lord, and the guilty fact was burning in his conscience as he spoke.

One sin ever brings on another. Saul, having been guilty of disobedience and avarice, now had to tell a lie to cover them up.

Yet doubtless Saul had arranged the facts in his own mind so as to persuade himself that he was telling the truth. He had carried out part of the command of the Lord, so that his statement was not all false, but was half true. Most lies have some truth in them and can be justified by such mental reservations.

But the truth that is in them does not change their moral character. Mixing some white lead in black paint does not make the black paint white.

A half truth may be a whole lie. Some truth must always be used to color up a falsehood and make it effective, but this use of truth is itself guilty deception.

3. A Falsehood Quickly Exposed

The king's falsehood received an immediate and unexpected exposure. "What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?"

While the king was speaking, out of the mouths of sheep and oxen he was contradicted and his falsehood laid bare.

No lie is secure, for sooner or later it comes to the point where it fails to match with facts and then its doom is upon it.

Often startling and dramatic are the ways in which it is exposed. A man may be telling a most clever and cunning lie and think he has secured himself against all possible detection at every point, but the prattling of a child or the bleating of a sheep may suddenly expose it. All nature stands

ready to blab against it. The most trivial circumstance may turn up its unmatched edge and show where it fails to fit the facts.

Many a man flatters himself that he is secure and unsuspected in his false life when there are bleating sheep all around him that are advertising his guilt to others. "Be sure your sin will find you out."

4. Adroit Self-exculpation

Confronted with these unexpected witnesses, the king was forced into the pitiful predicament of having to account for the very sheep he had virtually stolen. But Saul was shrewd and ready with an answer: "They have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed."

This answer is a masterpiece of adroit self-exculpation worthy to be compared with Adam's self-defence after eating the forbidden fruit.

First, it rolls the burden of guilt wholly on others: "they" and "the people" did it. These are broad, vague terms, but they are not broad enough to include Saul; whoever they take in, they make sure of leaving him out.

This excuse is as old as the first sin, and we seem never to lose faith in it. Whenever we commit sin we begin to hunt around for some one else to blame it on.

Next, the answer avers that the people "spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen;" this suggests that they did only a good and reasonable thing. The vile and refuse were destroyed according to the commandment, but of course the best were spared, for the Lord surely would not want these destroyed.

Thus the command was changed to suit the people's desire, and then their disobedience was dressed up to look like a righteous act.

We also become expert at adapting God's commandments to our desires, instead of adapting our desires to God's commandments.

Further, the best sheep were spared for a religious purpose, "to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God." Notice the cunning appeal to Samuel in the phrase, "the Lord thy God." Surely so high and holy an end as sacrificing these sheep to the Lord God would sanctify the act and disarm criticism on the part of either Samuel or the Lord!

We often think to cover our iniquities by throwing over them the cloak of a good motive, especially of a religious use.

Do not men unscrupulous in business and even gamblers and thieves sometimes think that if they give part of their ill-gotten gains to the church or education or philanthropy they thereby remove any taint from what remains and justify their whole business and all their methods?

May not wealth that has been unjustly wrung from the sweat of the poor or gained from robbing widows thus be thought to be consecrated and sanctified by being laid on the altar of God's house?

Saul's final point was, "and the rest we have utterly destroyed." When explaining his disobedience of the commandment, he said "they" did it, but when he came to the part of the commandment that was kept, he said "we" did it.

He cunningly shaped his statement so as to keep himself clear of any blame, and yet so as to retain his full share in the credit of the transaction.

On this point he grows emphatic and vociferates that the rest were utterly destroyed. Saul was willing to destroy some sheep, if he were only allowed to pick out the sheep.

We also are willing to fall upon some sins furiously and destroy them utterly, if we are only permitted to pick out the sins, sins that are no temptation to us, for such condemnation, and keep the ones we want.

5. Obedience Better Than Sacrifice

Samuel met this tissue of excuse and multiplied falsehoods which Saul had woven around himself with a plain statement of fact. He first narrated

the steps and the means by which Saul had been called from obscurity to the throne. He then recited the command that had been given him of the Lord and confronted him with the question why he had not obeyed, but had done evil.

Here was Saul's chance for repentance and honest confession.

But his conscience was now so broken down that he would not repent, and he persisted in his false and cowardly plea in all its aggravations.

The king has discrowned himself and has degenerated into a slave.

Samuel now answers him in terms of judgment. He first meets Saul's plea of intended sacrifice with the declaration, "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."

Out of the heart of the Bible with all its symbols and ceremonies rolls this great principle of the spirituality of religion.

No amount of outward ritual can take the place of inward righteousness. The letter may kill and it is only the spirit that can give life.

Then came the judgment, "Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king."

Disobedience costs. We cannot reject God and be as good as ever.

Our rejection of him necessitates his rejection of us. The bond of faith and obedience being broken, the common life of fellowship cannot go on. Saul lost his earthly kingdom, and we may lose a greater kingdom, even an eternal.

Disobedience discrowns the soul. We cannot reject God and keep our best selves. Hold fast that which thou hast that no man take thy crown.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. Give an account of the early life of Saul.
2. May there be a good deal of hypocrisy in our social greetings and forms of etiquette?
3. What is a falsehood and why is it wrong?
4. What are some ways in which falsehood may be exposed?
5. Why is obedience better than sacrifice?

LESSON XI.—MARCH 16

THE REIGN OF DAVID

What David Achieved for Israel

Golden Text: I delight to do thy will, O my God. Psalm 40:8.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 24:3-10.

Lesson Material: I Samuel 16—II Samuel 24.

Lesson Text: II Samuel 7:18–26; 8:14–15

18 ¶ Then went king David in, and sat before the LORD, and he said, Who *am* I, O Lord GOD? and what *is* my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?
19 And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord GOD; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come. And *is* this the manner of man, O Lord GOD?
20 And what can David say more unto thee? for thou, Lord GOD, knowest thy servant.
21 For thy word's sake, and according to thine own heart, hast thou done all these great things, to make thy servant know *them*.
22 Wherefore thou art great, O LORD God: for *there is* none like thee, neither *is there any* God besides thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears.
23 And what one nation in the earth *is* like thy people, *even* like Israel, whom God went to redeem for a people to himself, and to make him a name, and to do for you great things and terrible, for thy land, before thy people, which thou redeemedst to thee from Egypt, *from* the nations and their gods?
24 For thou hast confirmed to thyself thy people Israel *to be* a people unto thee for ever: and thou, LORD, art become their God.
25 And now, O LORD God, the word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant, and concerning his house, establish *it* for ever, and do as thou hast said.
26 And let thy name be magnified for ever, saying, The LORD of hosts *is* the God over Israel: and let the house of thy servant David be established before thee.

14 ¶ And he put garrisons in Edom: throughout all Edom put he garrisons, and all they of Edom became David's servants. And the LORD preserved David whithersoever he went.
15 And David reigned over all Israel; and David executed judgment and justice unto all his people.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. ***David's Submissive Humility.***
2. ***His Great Disappointment.***
3. ***Unshaken Trust.***
4. ***An Exalted Nation.***
5. ***An Appeal to the Divine Faithfulness.***
6. ***David's Vigorous and Righteous Reign.***

Another long stride carries us forward from Saul to David. After passing through many vicissitudes David is now established on his throne over a united nation. His capital city is founded and fortified. The ark has been put in its proper place and public worship inaugurated. A palace for the king has been built of costly imported wood by foreign artisans.

David has reached a point where he might be expected to rest on his achievements. But he ever "went on," and another noble ambition seized his heart.

As he sat in his luxurious palace he thought of the ark of God dwelling in a curtained tent, and the contrast between the two did not seem to him fitting and proper. His fine sense of rhythm was offended by the discrepancy as by a painful discord: he would have the house of man and the house of God match and make one music.

There should always be proportion and harmony between the home and church.

And so David conceived the plan of building a great temple whose stately proportions and splendid architecture would enrich the city and be worthy of the worship of Jehovah.

His ambition, however, met with a sudden and sharp prohibition from Jehovah himself. The proper time for building the temple had not come and David was not the right man to do it. At this point our lesson opens.

1. David's Submissive Humility

It is beautiful to see how David accepted this prohibition.

He did not fret and rebel against it, but received it in submissive humility.

"Then went king David in, and sat before the Lord, and said, Who am I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto?"

A king is in the habit of having his own way and is little given to exercising submission and patience when met with denial and disappointment. David had cherished his plan of building a temple until it had become his

great ambition and pursuit and passion. It might have been expected that the sudden prohibition put upon his plan would unloose his self-restraint and throw him into a violent fit of temper.

But David was instantly humbled and went into the tabernacle and "sat before the Lord": a good place to go when we are struck with sharp and hard disappointment.

He meditated upon his own dependence, his humble origin and upon the evident hand of God in bringing him to his present estate. A sense of God's sovereignty seized his soul and awed him into humility and submission. He bowed before the will of God in the spirit of the prayer, "Thy will be done."

There are times when we may feel that we have been struck a hard blow by the hand of God, some fond ambition has been denied us or great sorrow has fallen upon us, and in such a time we should sit still before God and feel his sovereignty quieting our souls.

2. A Greater House

Over against David's house or family, which was "a small thing," God set a greater house which was yet to come: "And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord God: but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come."

While denying to David the privilege of building a house of worship for Jehovah, yet God promised that the temple should be built by David's son and successor (13); and not only so, but a still greater house should be built for David: "And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever" (16).

The greater house to be built for David was the kingdom of God as it was to rise under the work of his hands and of those that were to come after him throughout the long line of builders down to the end of time.

David doubtless little understood the real meaning and greatness of this promise. Perhaps he could see in it little more than his own dynasty and

especially his little Judean Kingdom, but it passed beyond this narrow horizon and swept off into the worldwide plan and purpose of God in redeeming all mankind and building a kingdom wide as the world, lofty as the sky, holy as the unspotted throne of the great white God, and lasting as eternity.

This " greater house " is going up today under the work of our hands and in a large sense it fulfills the promise made to David and is a greater glory to his name and work than any cedar or marble temple he could have built.

When God denies to us anything on which we have set our hearts it is because he has some better thing in store for us.

This principle was illustrated on a great scale in the Hebrew expectation of a Messiah, which was bitterly disappointed according to their hope but gloriously fulfilled in a grander way; and the whole argument of the Book of Hebrews is that God " provided some better thing for us " (11:40).

3. Unshaken Trust

David proceeds in his prayer to express his unshaken trust in God. He has profound comfort in the fact that God knows him in his infinite wisdom and love and therefore can be perfectly trusted, however strange and dark may be the ways of his providence. "For thy word's sake, and according to thine own heart, has thou done all these great things, to make thy servant know them."

Whoever else is false, God will be true to his own word and in him we can put our utmost confidence.

God does great things for us, not only in fulfilment of his work, but also out of his own heart: it is not simply to keep a pledge that he will bless us, but also because these streams of goodness flow right out of his inmost Fatherly heart and are the expression of his deepest nature.

No wiser, kinder and better thing can God do for us than just to let his heart prompt his action towards us. Out of God came Christ to show us God's heart and assure us that God is light and love and in him is no darkness at all.

Finally, in expressing his unshaken trust David falls back upon the greatness of God and simply rests in the everlasting Arm. "Wherefore thou art great, O Lord God: for there is none like thee, neither is there any God besides thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears."

We have a far grander exhibition of the greatness of God than had David, for his little heavens that declared the glory of God to him have been expanded for us into our infinitely greater universe swarming with suns and constellations on which even astronomers gaze with speechless wonder.

But the greater God is, the safer we are. The little bird is not alarmed at the vastness of the earth but builds its nest in security upon it, and the tiny blades of grass root themselves with confidence down in its rocks.

So may we lay hold on the greatness of God and be calm and strong, for though the earth be removed and the mountains be hurled into the sea, yet will we fear no evil, for God is with us.

4. An Exalted Nation

From a sense of his own security David rises to a view of the greatness of his nation. "And what nation in the earth is like unto thy people, even like Israel, whom God went to redeem for a people to himself, and to make him a name, and to do for you great things and terrible, for thy land, before thy people, which thou redeemedst to thee from Egypt, from the nations and their gods?"

True as it was then, is not this view of the Hebrew people true unto this day? Has not God done great and peculiar things for this people and made them a name that is unique and unequalled among all the peoples of the world?

What other people today has such an ancient and wonderful history behind them and has such glorious achievements in religious life and literature to their credit? Have they not just celebrated their 5683d New Year's Day, and what other people can boast of any such calendar and continuous history?

It is true that they have been a people of tragedy and sorrow, whose sufferings and tears are the pity of the world, but they are also laurelled with a glory that no other people can claim. Literally it is true of them that "God hath not dealt so with any nation."

Yet other nations can also make the same claim on other grounds, for God has a special mission for every people, and no other nation has greater reason for gratitude to God for his special favor than has our own.

For our continent and country, racial stock and development, history and achievement, in spite of all our faults and failures, we can thank God and humbly say, "What one nation in the earth is like" our "people?" This consciousness should not make us proud and boastful, but thankful and humble.

5. An Appeal to the Divine Faithfulness

David closes his prayer with an appeal to the divine faithfulness. "And now, O Lord God, the word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant, and concerning his house, establish it for ever, and do as thou hast said."

But will not God do as he has said without our reminding him of his word and calling upon him to be faithful to it?

No doubt he will, but this is part of the objection that is raised to any praying on the ground that God knows our need and will do the best thing for us anyway, so that our prayer is needless if not impertinent.

But is not our prayer itself part of the condition of its fulfilment?

Our prayer enters into our condition and is a part of our very personality, so that God can do more for us in the act and spirit of praying than he can when our souls do not rise to him in petition and receptivity. Appealing to God to be faithful to his own word will not bind him with a new obligation and add to his faithfulness, but it will enable him to fulfil his word and will in us in a way and degree that he cannot if we remain aloof from him. The psychology of prayer is just the psychology of the parent in desiring children to make their desires known unto him, however well known they may already be to him.

God would have us enter into the full filial relation of fellowship with him, making known all our desires to him and pleading his own faithfulness to his promises.

His faithfulness is conditioned upon our faithfulness, and the two must work together in harmony. Did we plead God's own word more earnestly, he could and would bless us more richly.

6. *David's Vigorous and Righteous Reign*

The closing verses of the lesson give us a view of David's vigorous and [illegible] reign. He swept enemies out of his borders on the right and the left, built fortresses and garrisoned them, and executed judgment and justice unto all his people.

He was a strong builder and administrator, and he enforced justice among all classes.

Such government is the foundation of national peace and prosperity and strength at home and abroad, and on such rulers and nations the blessing of God will rest.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. Give an account of the steps by which David rose to the throne.
2. Why was David not permitted to build the temple?
3. In what different ways may we accept and bear disappointments?
4. What grounds do we have for trusting God in times of trial?
5. In what respects is our nation peculiarly exalted?
6. What are some points in a good government?

LESSON XII.—MARCH 23

THE REIGN OF SOLOMON

Lessons from Solomon's Reign

Golden Text: The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Proverbs 1:7.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 45:1-7.

Lesson Material: I Kings 3—11; II Chron. 1.

Lesson Text: II Chronicles 1:7-12; I Kings 11:6-11

7 ¶ In that night did God appear unto Solomon, and said unto him, Ask what I shall give thee.
8 And Solomon said unto God, Thou hast shewed great mercy unto David my father, and hast made me to reign in his stead.
9 Now, O LORD God, let thy promise unto David my father be established: for thou hast made me king over a people like the dust of the earth in multitude.
10 Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people: for who can judge this thy people, *that is so* great?
11 And God said to Solomon, Because this was in thine heart, and thou hast not asked riches, wealth, or honour, nor the life of thine enemies, neither yet hast asked long life; but hast asked wisdom and knowledge for thyself, that thou mayest judge my people, over whom I have made thee king:
12 Wisdom and knowledge *is* granted unto thee; and I will give thee riches, and wealth, and honour, such as none of the kings have had that *have been* before thee, neither shall there any after thee have the like.

6 And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went not fully after the LORD, as *did* David his father.
7 Then did Solomon build a high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that *is* before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon.
8 And likewise did he for all his strange wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods.
9 ¶ And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the LORD God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice,
10 And had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods: but he kept not that which the LORD commanded.
11 Wherefore the LORD said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. *Solomon's Dream.*
2. *His Remarkable Request.*
3. *The Lord's Remarkable Answer.*

4. A Sudden Turn to Sin.
5. The Anger of the Lord.
6. A Lost Kingdom.

David passes, and we find Solomon on the throne. He stepped upon it just as it was rising to the zenith of its power and glory. Already he was the idol of his people, and a brilliant future lay before him. No more splendid prospect ever dazzled the eyes of youth at the threshold of life. It was enough to blind and lead astray one of older years and riper judgment and wisdom.

Soon after his coronation Solomon proceeded in company with a great concourse of dignitaries to the sacred city of Gibeon, where was the tabernacle of the Lord. A solemn assembly was held and a thousand offerings were sacrificed at the altar.

1. Solomon's Dream

That night an event occurred that threw its influence over Solomon's whole life. As he lay in slumber the Spirit of the Lord visited him in a dream and said, "Ask what I shall give thee."

The entire scene of this event is set in the theater of dreamland: it was only a dream choice that Solomon made. Yet this does not destroy its deep-rooted reality but may rather confirm it.

Dreams are by no means a capricious and chaotic world, but are bounded by our nature and habits and are woven of the inmost tissues of our being and have profound psychological and moral meaning.

They often reveal the deeper currents of life, the things that are unconsciously working at the roots of our being.

They show us picturesquely what we are and are often a startling self-revelation. The choice that comes forth in a dream, then, may shoot from the core of our character and may manifest our moral nature as truly as a deliberated volition.

"Ask what I shall give thee."

What a tempting and dangerous offer was this to put before the youthful and inexperienced Solomon!

It virtually placed within his reach whatever he would choose to have: he might have long life and a prosperous reign, wealth and power and fame; or he might have wisdom from the Lord. It was a critical moment with him; a breath might turn the scale.

Essentially the same choice is placed before us.

God has not decided our destiny for us, but has endowed us with the power of will and put our destiny in our own hands. He is ever asking us, What shall I give thee, and we may have good or evil according as we choose.

If we hide our lives with Christ in God so as to turn our wills into coincidence with his will, he will trust us so as to let us ask and he will do as we say. "Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

2. His Remarkable Request

Solomon's answer to this request is remarkable for its wisdom and beauty and has been the praise of all the ages. After acknowledging God's kindness to his father and the honor conferred on himself, he said, "Give now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people: for who can judge this thy people, that is so great?"

When we consider what he might have asked for, this petition stands out in wonderful wisdom and splendid beauty.

He asked for "wisdom," "an understanding heart" (I Kings 3:9), for it is the heart that rules the life.

As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.

An understanding heart perceives the eternal difference between right and wrong and unerringly chooses the right. Solomon knew the dangers to which he would be exposed that would blind him to truth and righteousness and blur moral distinctions and therefore he prayed for a heart that would distinguish between the good and the bad.

Often we are tempted to venture on dangerous ground and strain the principles of righteousness to gain a personal point.

There are times when a lie seems to us better than the truth. There are hours when we would rather be rich than right.

But the understanding heart has a deeper and a truer view. It perceives that right, however slowly it may bring success, whatever losses and hardships it may encounter, however unpopular it may be, though it be opposed and persecuted, is still *right* and in the end will bring blessing; and that wrong, though it may be hidden from the sight of men, though it brings riches and wins popular success and applause, is still *wrong* and at last will work ruin.

The man of understanding heart perceives wrong when mixed up with his own interests as truly as when it colors the interests of others. He perceives the evil in his own heart. Amidst all the complicated and intertangled forms of right and wrong his understanding heart will discern between good and bad and keep him in the right path.

A great need of this world, whether in ruling empires and republics or in ruling our individual lives, is wisdom and knowledge and especially that wisdom that cometh from above and is born of the divine Spirit in our hearts.

3. The Lord's Remarkable Answer

This speech pleased the Lord and drew from him a remarkable answer that matched the prayer and went far beyond it. The Lord was pleased, first, with what Solomon did not ask for, long life, riches and vengeance upon his enemies.

These are the things that lie most directly in the line of our natural desires and that we reach after first.

But we cannot tell whether it will be good for us to have these things or not, and it is doubtful whether we ought to pray for them. A safer prayer is that of Agur, "Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food that is convenient for me."

What we leave out of our prayers is thus as important as what we put in, and we may please the Lord as much in our not asking as in our asking.

The Lord was pleased, next, with what Solomon did ask for, wisdom and knowledge, or an understanding heart, and this was given him in large measure beyond that of any man of his day.

When we ask in the right spirit for the right things, prayer works without fail.

Along with wisdom and knowledge was given him that for which he had not asked, both riches and honor. He got what he asked for, and then had these glittering things thrown in extra.

He received the wisdom of heaven because he asked for it, and the wealth of earth because he did not ask for it. He preferred grace to gold, and then got both.

The Lord is no niggardly giver, but when he finds a right suppliant the blessing flows until there is not room enough to receive it.

The best way to get gold is first to get grace. Right and riches are more closely connected than they often appear to be. Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.

4. A Sudden Turn to Sin

The lesson takes a sudden turn and we are startled to read that "Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord." We were not expecting this as we praised his wise choice and watched him building the temple and listened to his wonderful dedicatory prayer and saw his rising glory and fame.

We thought there was no skeleton in his closet as he was showing the queen of Sheba through his palace and opening every door: yet here it is.

All the buds and blossoms of his promising youth at last have withered. The sun that rose in such splendor and rode the sky in such majesty is now going down in murky fogs emitted from this marsh and mire. The life that in the morning sparkled with the dew of promise as though sown with diamonds, in the evening was dark with angry clouds and drenched with tears.

The Bible spares not Solomon, but with its accustomed honesty and truthfulness tells the whole story.

It was "when he was old" that this sin came to pass. Solomon was not old in years, for he was under sixty, but the burdens of state, rich living and sensual indulgence had made him old before his time. The man that made such a wise choice and displayed such strength of character in his youth went astray in his old age.

The ship after a long voyage made in safety may be wrecked in sight of its port. The tree that has blossomed forty summers may suddenly wither from an enemy at its root.

Temptation beats around our life until the last breath, and we must never think the victory won or relax our vigilance.

Occasionally a man who has stood tall and strong in the community for many years at last suddenly comes down with a crash. Yet we are not to suppose that an upright life is no safeguard in old age; and these unexpected stumblings have causes far back.

The tree that suddenly falls in the forest reveals a rotten heart, and it was so with Solomon. He went after false gods and had "strange wives" who led him astray.

Liberal religion and too many women are causes enough to bring any man down. Our religion should be broad, but there is a line between breadth and indiscriminate toleration which we should never pass.

" One wife " is a fundamental law of Christianity and it is one of the safeguards of the race. The violation of this law wreaks its own vengeance and it has stained all the pages of history with blood and tears.

5. The Anger of the Lord

"And the Lord was angry with Solomon." This is a new word and tone in the history of Solomon. Hitherto we have read that the Lord was pleased with Solomon and blessed him, but now the bright page darkens and divine love shows up its angry side.

Behind all love lies the power of anger; anger sleeps in love's nest.

Love and hate are obverse and reverse sides of the same power of emotion, and no moral being can have the one without the other. The same holy God whose nature is love can also flame and burn with righteous anger and let loose fearful lightnings of wrath. He would not be a respectable God if he put no difference between righteousness and wickedness and treated both alike.

The anger of the Lord is no respecter of persons and fell as quickly and as heavily on the brilliant and powerful Solomon as it did on his meanest subject; and with the same equal justice will he deal with us.

The anger of the Lord works for our good as surely as his love. If the Lord is angry with us, we need only look at our own conduct and we shall find the cause.

6. A Lost Kingdom

The Lord pronounced judgment upon Solomon in a concrete form: "I will surely rend the kingdom away from thee, and will give it to thy servant." Solomon by his toleration of idolatry and by the scandal of his private life had shown himself unfit to be the head and ruler of Jehovah's people, and therefore it was fitting and necessary that his kingdom should be taken from him.

Sin always costs and is the most expensive folly we can indulge. Sometimes we literally see the positions of master and servant reversed.

Solomon lost his kingdom, and we may easily lose ours, even the kingdom of our own souls. God's means and opportunities must be used, and if we do not wisely employ those entrusted to us, they shall be taken from us and given to others.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. Give some account of the early life of Solomon.

2. What is the origin of our dreams and what part may they play in our life?

3. What is the Freudian theory of dreams and what is psychoanalysis?
4. What is "wisdom" as contrasted with "knowledge"?
5. What should be our chief petitions in our prayers?
6. How can we reconcile God's anger with his love?

LESSON XIII.—MARCH 30

REVIEW: ABRAHAM TO SOLOMON

From Abraham to Solomon

Golden Text: The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. Psalm 103: 8.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 138.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. ***From Mesopotamia to Egypt.***
2. ***Out of Egypt to Sinai.***
3. ***Through the Wilderness to Canaan.***
4. ***The Judges and Samuel.***
5. ***From Saul to Solomon.***

In this "outline of Old Testament history" we take long strides from peak to peak, touching only outstanding points and summits of epochal importance.

It is a dramatic story emerging out of the mists of Mesopotamia before the curtain of history has risen upon that early cradle of the race and carrying us down through great crises in which a nation is founded and brought through its early stages of education and achievement to the splendor of Solomon's kingdom and its eclipse through his sin.

1. From Mesopotamia to Egypt

An old civilization had grown up in the Euphrates river valley and borne the hardened husks of idolatry so that there were there no proper soil and seed for a religious reformation and no new point of departure that would lead on into the light of the one true and living God.

Abraham was the man divinely picked for this reformation, the chosen seed that was to bear a great harvest and overspread the world.

We know little of his personal experience in his early life, but he appears on the stage with a divine call to get out of his country into a far land he knew not whither.

It was an unknown adventure full of daring and danger, but he responded with that unquestioning obedience that has been the mark of so many great souls and pioneers of humanity.

Household and substance were gathered together, for all that a man has should he take with him into a new life, and out across the desert of a thousand miles he found his way into Canaan.

There he met the Canaanite and thus found himself in the midst of a worse idolatry than that which he had left behind.

Nevertheless he was not woven into intimate associations with the new conditions as he was with the old and could make a new start, and there he received a great promise of the Lord, and then moved on west and south.

Years pass and in due time Abraham's greatgrandsons by a series of strange providences were settled in Egypt, another land saturated and soaked in idolatry with monstrous temples and mysterious rites of worship.

Joseph's brethren are forced down under the pressure of famine and are confronted with the brother they had sold into slavery, the dramatic plot grows ever more tangled until it is unraveled and the purpose of God is displayed.

Jacob, the old father of the boys, is brought down and a touching interview takes place between the aged patriarch and Pharaoh in which these two men, so widely apart in race and religion, yet show the deep affinities that bind all men together.

2. Out of Egypt to Sinai

A great deliverer was raised up in Egypt to deliver the people of Israel who had there spent centuries in bondage.

Moses stands forth as one of the epochal men of the world and overtops most of even the great men of history.

He was led out into the solitude of the wilderness to spend forty years in preparation, and he is there called to his great task.

> **Solitude has ever been the mother country in which strong men grow their roots.**

Moses raised an objection to his call, urging the point that he was no man for the hour and suggesting Aaron as a better man.

> **We may be too modest in our estimate of ourselves, especially when we are called to some duty that does not appeal to our taste or convenience or ambition.**

The objection was answered and the inability of Moses was supplemented by the promise of the divine presence and aid.

> **When God is with us, who can be against us, and this assurance should arm and energize us for every duty and danger.**

The time for action came and great words were to be translated into thrilling deeds.

The assembled multitude of the Hebrews, three millions in number, were hurried down to the border of the Red Sea, where they seemed to be on the point of being caught and crushed between the pitiless waves and the still more savage pursuing Egyptians.

> **A pillar of cloud was their guide and protection by day and night, and God has many such pillars that still go before or follow behind us.**

At the critical moment Moses stretched his hand over the sea, a great wind blew its waters off its bottom and laid bare a dry path on which the Israelites walked in safety to the other shore.

> **God can still cleave a path for us wherever he wants us to go, through any storm or sea.**

The enraged Egyptians followed hot after the Israelites, unwilling to lose their profitable slaves, but the waters rolled back upon them and horse and rider and chariot were swallowed up under the waves.

It was one of the greatest crossings in history, compared with which Cæsar's crossing the forbidden Rubicon was a trivial incident.

It was a passage from one great continent to another, from Africa to Asia, and from the gigantic overgrown effete civilization of Egypt to new national life in the promised land.

Behind them lay a long line of yesterdays that had fulfilled their part in the drama of history, and before them lay Christ and Christendom with all the best future and hope of the world.

Straight to Sinai the chosen people marched and there on that mass of granite rock Moses stood and received the Ten Words that are foundation stones in all our Christian civilization, and there the multitude were organized into a nation that has played a prominent part on the stage of the world and holds its place as a great and peculiarly gifted people to this day.

3. Through the Wilderness to Canaan

The Israelites expected that they would march from Sinai straight into the promised land that had so long been their passionate hope, but they were not prepared for this, and their lack of faith and disciplined courage cost them forty years of wandering in the wilderness.

They came up to the very edge of the new land and sent spies into it to investigate, but only a minority of two out of twelve favored immediate entrance, and the cowardly majority of ten raised such fears in the minds of the people over the picture they painted of the terrible sons of Anak that the whole mass of the people became panic stricken and wept in their cowardly weakness.

As often happens in such cases the people then turned upon their leaders and blamed the whole disaster on them and threatened to elect a new captain and go back to Egypt. Fame, even the greatest, is fickle, and the hero of today may be discredited and disgraced tomorrow.

The brave minority of two, the noble Joshua and Caleb, endeavored to rouse the people to some sense of their duty, and though they failed at the time yet they won their cause in the end.

A minority with God is always a majority.

Moses passes and Joshua comes to the front as the leader. The people were now to enter the promised land, but they could win it only as they put their feet down upon it in conquest and sealed it with the stamp of a foot-print title.

This is the way we must get all our best possessions, make them ours in experience.

Joshua the new general aroused the people with a bugle blast calling them to courage and action.

But their courage was to be controlled by conscience, and the book of the law was to be their written constitution and safeguard and inspiration. This may be taken as the first written national constitution that appears in history.

We commonly think that we were the first nation to achieve this instrument of government, but the ancients stole almost all our best ideas, and the Hebrews were ahead of the ancients in most things.

Time came when Joshua must utter his farewell, and he gave it in noble words.

4. The Judges and Samuel

The Judges in Israel were local rulers who rose to power through their own ability and deeds done. It was a rude time when there was no settled general government and "every man did that which was right in his own eyes." In such times in a newly settled country there is much lawlessness, and personal prowess counts, as was the case in our own western country in its early days. Twelve of these local rulers are mentioned in the Book of Judges from Othniel to Samson.

It was two hundred years after Joshua that Gideon arose as a leader when the Midianites invaded the land from the east like a swarm of grasshoppers.

He blew his trumpet and gathered thirty-two thousand men which by successive tests that sifted out the true soldiers were reduced to only three hundred.

Only tried men and true can be depended on in critical hours, and a small minority usually constitutes the active working force of a congregation.

Gideon used strange weapons, broken pitchers disclosing hidden lights that flashed out and gave the impression of a great army and threw the enemy into a panic and rout.

Novel methods are sometimes very effective in Christian work and warfare.

The result was a victory that gave Israel freedom and peace.

Samuel arose as a prophet and national figure who was the first to assemble and consolidate Israel as a unit.

He called the people to repentance and then hurled them against the Philistines, powerful enemies on the west, and won another notable victory which was celebrated in song and story in the history of Israel.

5. From Saul to Solomon

Some great names blaze out in the closing lessons of the quarter.

Saul started out with fine promise in his youth but degenerated into disobedience and hypocrisy that wrought his ruin.

He greeted Samuel who came to him in judgment with a pious ejaculation, but while honey was upon his lips falsehood was in his heart.

He was adroit at self-exculpation, but the very sheep that he had stolen blabbed out against him and he was convicted in the most unexpected and startling way.

Sin finds strange tongues for telling on the sinner and dumb things will speak out against him.

Samuel read the apostate king a great lesson on the spirituality of worship, showing that obedience is better than sacrifice.

David succeeded Saul and we have one important event in his life. He had planned to build a temple of worship that would match his own royal palace and was gathering materials for it when a divine prohibition estopped him from further action and this great disappointment fell upon him heavily.

Yet he accepted it in a humble and submissive spirit and only rested more securely in his trust in God.

David passes and Solomon appears upon the throne just as it was rising to the zenith of its power and glory.

Solomon started out by making a choice that has been the praise of all the ages, and in answer received both grace and gold, for the kingdom of God brings with it all good things.

Yet Solomon in his last days darkened the bright promise of his youth by following false gods and taking strange wives, and his retribution was that his kingdom was rent away from him.

Sin always costs and has caused the loss of many a kingdom.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. What is the place and power of great men in history?
2. What part has emigration played in the world?
3. Did the Israelites gain anything of educational value in Egypt?
4. What contribution has Sinai made to our modern world?
5. What is the strength and what are the weaknesses of monarchy as a form of government?
6. Give brief character sketches of Saul, David, and Solomon.

INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND QUARTER

The internal weakness of the Hebrew monarchy, the revolt of the northern tribes under Jeroboam, the new capital at Samaria with its rival idolatrous worship, the critical epoch when Elijah appeared and endeavored to restore the worship of Jehovah, the increasing aggression of the Syrians and then of the terrible Assyrians, the gentler ministry and the broad statesmanship of Elisha, the later prophets of the kingdom of Israel, Amos and Hosea speaking bold blunt speech of condemnation and warning, the final crash of Samaria into Assyrian exile, the slower but parallel decline of the kingdom of Judah, the luxury in Jerusalem unsparingly denounced by Isaiah, Jeremiah's prophecy against his own city and country, the fall of Jerusalem and the Babylonian captivity, and the restoration of Judah under Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah—these are the high lights in the history reviewed in this Quarter, the mountain peaks in this range.

At this period Greece and Rome had not yet appeared above the horizon, and Egypt and Babylon were the two world empires that made Palestine their common attack and battleground.

These personages are not fictitious characters, like the wooden images that often move across the pages of fiction, but were alive and alert with all the motives and passions that beat in our breasts and move in our modern life. We should try to put ourselves in their places and see through their eyes and feel with their emotions.

The Bible is a wonderfully modern book in that it constantly exhibits the same principles that are at work in our lives and fit into our experiences. We are not to study it with purely antiquarian or historical interest, but for personal application as a means of growth in grace and better living.

SECOND QUARTER

Outline of Old Testament History

From the Division of the Kingdom to the Close of the Old Testament

(Second Quarter of a Six Months' Course)

LESSON I.—APRIL 6

THE KINGDOM RENT ASUNDER

Why the Kingdom Was Divided

Golden Text: Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. Proverbs 16:18.

Devotional Reading: Psalms 131, 133.

Lesson Material: I Kings 12:1—16:28.

Lesson Text: I Kings 12:12-20

12 ¶ So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king had appointed, saying, Come to me again the third day.

13 And the king answered the people roughly, and forsook the old men's counsel that they gave him;

14 And spake to them after the counsel of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father *also* chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.

15 Wherefore the king hearkened not unto the people; for the cause was from the Lord, that he might perform his saying, which the Lord spake by Ahijah the Shilonite unto Jeroboam the son of Nebat.

16 ¶ So when all Israel saw that the king hearkened not unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? neither *have we* inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David. So Israel departed unto their tents.

17 But *as for* the children of Israel which dwelt in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them.

18 Then king Rehoboam sent Adoram, who *was* over the tribute; and all Israel stoned him with stones, that he died. Therefore king Rehoboam made speed to get him up to his chariot, to flee to Jerusalem.

19 So Israel rebelled against the house of David unto this day.

20 And it came to pass, when all Israel heard that Jeroboam was come again, that they sent and called him unto the congregation, and made him king over all Israel: there was none that followed the house of David, but the tribe of Judah only.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. *A Reasonable Petition.*
2. *An Unreasonable Answer.*
3. *Revolution!*
4. *Rehoboam's Vain Effort to Save His Kingdom.*
5. *Jeroboam.*

The united kingdom of Israel had now reached its zenith, but disruptive forces were at work that wrought its division and started it on a long decline that ended in the pit of Babylonian captivity.

The division of a country in some instances has good and in other cases evil consequences. The separation of our country from England was necessary and good, but its division into a northern republic and a southern confederacy would have been an incalculable disaster as the whole country now acknowledges.

The disruption of the Hebrew monarchy developed the vigorous northern tribes into an independence and strength that they might not otherwise have attained, but evils also grew out of the disunion that in time wrecked both kingdoms.

Bad statesmanship and arbitrary despotism and growing grievances brought on the division and final downfall.

Solomon's son and heir was Rehoboam, whose mother was an idolatrous Ammonitess. The fruit of this unholy union was the weak-willed and insolent son that wrecked the splendid empire of his father.

A strong and wise hand could have held the kingdom together but Rehoboam's arrogant spirit and infirm hand let it fall asunder.

The inauguration of the new king took place at Shechem, instead of at Jerusalem, which shows the preponderating influence of the northern tribes.

1. A Reasonable Petition

The people, through Jeroboam, presented a petition setting forth their grievances (4). They recounted the heavy burdens laid upon them by the

king's father, asked that these might be lightened, and pledged their loyalty to the king.

The increasing burden of taxation to support the splendid establishment built up by David and still further enlarged and loaded down with still heavier taxation by Solomon resulted in social unrest and political rebellion that found expression in this petition.

The appeal was just in its complaints and moderate in its demands and opened the way for removing evils and binding the nation into unity.

Wise statesmanship would have seized the golden opportunity for composing complaints and planting the throne solidly in the hearts of the people.

Rehoboam took three days to consider the matter, which was a wise step. He first counseled with the old men who had been associated with his father, and they gave him the good advice that he should grant the petition of his people and make them his loyal subjects.

This counsel would have saved the nation, but Rehoboam rejected it, and next heard the young men.

These were a set of fast youth that had grown up in the same circle and atmosphere with Rehoboam and were full of his arrogance and insolence. They advised him to run the kingdom with a high hand and make his little finger thicker than his father's loins.

The disposition to rush into rash judgment and action is one of the dangers of youth against which young people should be on their guard.

2. An Unreasonable Answer

The misguided king returned an unreasonable answer to this reasonable petition. He was very insolent and exasperating in his reply, declaring, "I will add to your yoke: my father also chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions."

Rehoboam played the fool at several points. He showed his lack of judgment and sense in the advice he followed.

The old men with whom he first counseled had experience and wisdom; they knew the state of the kingdom, the origin of the evils, the heavy burden of the taxes, and the temper of the people; and their advice was reasonable and just, and would have quieted discontent, nipped rebellion in the bud and established the throne.

The young men, whose counsel was next sought, were inexperienced and rash, just the kind of youth that have no respect for the wisdom of age and think they can cut loose from all restraints and run things to suit their own selfish and passionate wills.

That Rehoboam had no more discernment than to reject the counsel of his experienced and constitutional advisers and follow the foolish advice of his hot-headed and dissolute companions shows his lack of sense and his unfitness for the throne.

The advice that a young man follows is one test of his judgment and character. Experience is the school of wisdom, and the graduates from this school should always be accorded a candid hearing. Youth tends towards inconsiderate rash action and should be slow and sure it is right before rejecting the counsel of old age.

Many a young man shows his folly in refusing the advice of his father or mother and accepting the counsel of ungodly companions.

Rehoboam further showed his short-sighted judgment in supposing he could spurn the petitions and trample upon the rights of his people with impunity.

In dealing with others, especially those that are in any way subject to us, we should be on our guard against an unjust and tyrannical spirit, and should be so patient and sympathetic and helpful as that we may win the loyalty of others and make our very enemies our friends.

Conciliation will heal grievances and prevent strife and division in social and industrial relations and in church and state when an imperious and arbitrary policy will work ruin.

3. Revolution!

In answer to this rash reply of the king the infuriated people raised a cry that has so often proved ominous, Revolution! "What portion have

we in David? . . . to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David. So Israel departed unto their tents."

That was a fateful day for the chosen people that cast its shadow, down through many centuries of strife.

The nation was cleft asunder right across its rocky backbone. The kingdom was fissured from east to west, and north and south fell apart, ten tribes to the north, and two tribes to the south.

On that little strip of seacoast, not larger than some of our western counties, henceforth two kingdoms stand facing each other, sometimes in friendly relations and sometimes in hostile strife.

The people of Israel had just grievances. Judah was the seat of government and art and culture, and the rural people of the north were growing suspicious of it; they were taxed terribly to keep up that splendid establishment in Jerusalem, and Rehoboam's insulting answer was the spark that exploded their wrath in rebellion.

Yet they were too precipitate and were probably wrong in their revolt. Rehoboam was their lawful king and they were under allegiance to him. He had just come to the throne and should have been given a trial.

The splitting of the nation into two hostile fragments was such a tremendous, far-reaching disaster as should have given its authors pause.

This weakened and wasted the energies of the nation, sowed it with bitterness and passion and unloaded a terrible burden of evil on coming generations.

It is wise to bear with great evils rather than fly to others that may be greater still. The temptation is often strong with us to resort to violent measures in adjusting grievances. It frequently happens that families, churches, States, are split because grieved members have not the patience to bear and wait.

But such divisions usually create more evil than they cure. Unity is so great a good, the necessary basis of so many blessings, that we should sacrifice and suffer much in order that we may maintain it.

4. Rehoboam's Vain Effort to Save His Kingdom

Rehoboam now realized that his kingdom was breaking in two under his hand, and he took measures to hold it together. He first sent Adoram, the chief tax collector or secretary of the treasury, to try to keep the ten tribes in the kingdom. But his appearance on the scene only enraged the people, "and all Israel stoned him with stones, that he died."

> The idea of sending the chief tax collector, the most obnoxious man in all the country, to appease the people! This plan shows the blindness of the king, how little he understood the psychology of human nature.

Taxation was the exasperation of the northern farmers and fishermen, and the very sight of the official head and front of the whole hated business called forth violent rage and a volley of stones.

> Rehoboam realized that he was losing his kingdom when it was too late.

He now could do nothing but mount his chariot and flee to Jerusalem. A moderate concession in time might have averted a disaster which a considerable concession, made when the critical point was passed, only precipitated. Rehoboam, in the day of his reckless disregard of wise counsel and his big talk and insolent tyranny, sinned away his opportunity, and now nothing could save him.

> The youth that rejects the teachings of pious parents and walks in the counsel of the ungodly and sits in the seat of the scornful, that thinks he is smart enough to break the laws of life with impunity, in his blindness and folly will lose a kingdom that cannot be recovered with strong crying and tears.

5. Jeroboam

Israel, having raised the standard of revolt against Rehoboam, now rallied around Jeroboam. He was a man who as a youth had attracted the attention of Solomon by his ability as a worker and organizer. "Solomon seeing the young man that he was industrious, he made him ruler over all the charge of the house of Joseph" (11:28).

This is the step on which many men rise to high positions. They show their ability and efficiency in lower levels of work and are sure to be called up higher.

Nearly all of our captains of industry and even of our presidents have risen on these steps of deeds done. The best way for any one to obtain a higher position is to crowd his present position full of faithful, efficient service.

Solomon made Jeroboam the director of public works where he came under the eye of a still more important man than Solomon. A prophet saw in Jeroboam a coming king and privately apprised him of his destiny (11:29-40). Solomon heard of this, and Jeroboam had to fly to Egypt to save his life.

At Solomon's death, Jeroboam returned and was present in Israel at this critical juncture (11:29-40). His hour had struck, and the new kingdom gave him the crown by acclamation.

Ability and industry were thus the two hands by which this humble son of a widow climbed to the throne, and the same powers will lift any man upward towards the top.

"All Israel . . . sent and called him unto the congregation, and made him king over all Israel." It was by the action of the people that he was made king. The government was monarchical in form, but it was democratic in spirit.

The Bible is a democratic book all the way through, and out of it have come our democratic institutions. It recognizes the equality of all men in their fundamental human rights, and men inspired with this spirit will not long tolerate despotic kings and forms of government, and so such rulers are having a hard time of it in our modern world.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. What were some differences between the northern and the southern tribes in Israel that were likely to create political trouble?
2. What is the cause and what is the cure of friction and strife in the industrial world?
3. Give other instances in which nations have passed through revolutions.
4. When is a revolution right?
5. What kingdoms may we lose and how?

I. HISTORY OF ISRAEL, THE NORTHERN KINGDOM

LESSON II.—APRIL 13

ELIJAH AND THE STRUGGLE WITH BAAL

How Elijah Won the Victory

Golden Text: Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Matthew 6: 24.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 15.

Lesson Material: I Kings 16:29—19:21; 21; II Kings 1:1—2:12.

Lesson Text: I Kings 18:20–24, 36–39

20 So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto mount Carmel.

21 And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD *be* God, follow him: but if Baal, *then* follow him. And the people answered him not a word.

22 Then said Elijah unto the people, I, *even* I only, remain a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets *are* four hundred and fifty men.

23 Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay *it* on wood, and put no fire *under:* and I will dress the other bullock, and lay *it* on wood, and put no fire *under:*

24 And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken.

36 And it came to pass at *the time of* the offering of the *evening* sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, LORD GOD of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou *art* God in Israel, and *that* I *am* thy servant, and *that* I have done all these things at thy word.

37 Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou *art* the LORD God, and *that* thou hast turned their heart back again.

38 Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that *was* in the trench.

39 And when all the people saw *it*, they fell on their faces: and they said, THE LORD, he *is* the God; the LORD, he *is* the God.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. The Proposed Test.

2. Elijah's Preparation for the Trial.

3. The Prophet's Prayer.

4. A Tongue of Flame from Heaven.
5. The False Prophets Slain.

About seventy-five years have passed since the kingdom was rent asunder and Jeroboam set up the kingdom of Israel at Samaria as its capital. Ahab was the fifth king in succession from Jeroboam and has the evil reputation of being about the wickedest king, as he had the wickedest wife, among these northern kings, who were notoriously a bad lot.

Elijah is the bold prophet who steps upon the scene at this point and confronts Ahab, who with Jezebel his Phenician wife had established the abominable worship of Baal, a licentious Phenician god, in Samaria.

The prophet let loose the judgment of God on the land in the form of a drought.

Three years passed and the drought had burned the land bare, and the people were in the extremity of distress. The time had come to strike a decisive blow for the abolishment of idolatry and the reestablishment of the true worship. The fruit of the famine was to be reaped in a great harvest of faith.

Elijah, who had been in hiding from Ahab, was ordered out of his retreat into active service. The prophet met the king and repelled the charge of being the troubler of Israel by boldly branding this guilt on Ahab himself.

1. The Proposed Test

Elijah now proposed to Ahab a trial of the relative truth and power of the worship of Baal and the worship of Jehovah. The four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal were to place a bullock on an altar and pray to their god to consume it with fire, and Elijah was to do the same; "and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God."

This test was in accordance with the ideas of the age and was fair and conclusive.

The central mountain range that runs through Palestine like a spinal column, when it comes to the plain of Esdraelon, turns to the northwest, plunges seaward and buries its rocky roots in the blue Mediterranean.

On the top of this giant altar the grand trial took place.

The summit at one point is a broad plateau in full view on every side of distant portions of the land and is set in a mighty frame of mountain, plain and sea, a vast theater apparently built for just such a solemn and momentous spectacle. Close to its base flows the Kishon, and on its slope is a mountain pool that persists through the severest drouth.

On the appointed day a great multitude assembled and the trial was on. The prophets of Baal built their pile of wood, put their bullock on it and began to call upon their god. All day long they cried ceaselessly and in their frenzy leaped and cut themselves with knives, while Elijah mocked them and with keen irony taunted their helpless deity.

No answer came; the heavens had no tongue of flame for such faith.

False religions have been given full time and opportunity to show what they can do. Where is the country they have cleansed and uplifted, the souls they have saved, the fire they have drawn from heaven? Superstition and unbelief have no divine flame that can burn away a single sin.

2. Elijah's Preparation for the Trial

Elijah's time was now come. The sun was westering and its level rays glowed on Carmel's crown. The false prophets ceased their clamorous cries, a hush fell upon the multitude, and Elijah spoke. He called upon the people to come near, and the throng pressed closer. He then repaired the altar of the Lord that was thrown down, probably one of the altars of Jehovah destroyed by Jezebel.

Repairing the altar of the Lord is a good way to begin a reform.

The nation that has forgotten God must take its first right step by returning to his altar. A weakened and distracted church may find the cause of its trouble in neglected prayer. A fallen family altar is the root of weakness and worldliness in many a Christian home.

Repair your altar and make it strong and beautiful in the worship of the Lord.

In rebuilding the altar Elijah took twelve stones, symbolizing the twelve tribes to whom God had given the name Israel.

This act was a silent but powerful appeal to the unity of the nation that lay deeper and broader than the unhappy division of the tribes.

In this supreme trial the prophet would have the disrupted nation unified in the worship of its true God. This appeal would touch a deep, rich chord in the hearts of the people and wake the music of the olden days and ancient glory.

In repairing a fallen altar, be sure that you also repair strained relations and broken fellowships. Heal your divisions and strifes at the altar in which every member is represented by a stone.

Elijah dug a trench around the altar, put wood on the stones and a bullock on the wood, and then poured jar after jar of water over it all until it was drenched and saturated and the trench was full.

Why was this? To shut out the possibility of deception and fraud which were frequently practiced in connection with such affairs. Elijah would show the people beyond doubt that there was no imposture in it and that the fire came, not from earth, but from heaven.

Christianity was not done in a corner, but in the open day; and it has no cunningly devised fables and clever tricks with which to deceive the world, but it blazons its reality in many infallible proofs.

3. The Prophet's Prayer

All things were now ready and Elijah made his appeal to his God. At the time of the evening sacrifice he drew near and said, "Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again."

This is one of the noblest prayers in the Bible, inspired in its language and logic, concentrated and definite in its aim, pure in its purpose and mighty in its power.

After the insensate cries of the false prophets, it must have fallen upon the silent and awed multitude like the solemn majestic strains of lofty music, awakening thoughts and memories that were too deep for tears.

In appealing to the "God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel," Elijah aroused the national consciousness of the past and set these potent personages to praying with him; all the mighty dead crowded their supplications into his cry.

> In our prayers we appeal to the "God of our fathers," and take our stand upon his faithfulness to past generations, and thus turn all the voices of the dead and all the centuries of history into one mighty prayer.

Elijah's prayer was definite and pointed in its aim. Our prayers are often split into too many petitions and wander around in aimless vagueness.

> We do not pray as we ought because we do not know what we want and still less what we need. The prophet had an intense consciousness of one need and concentrated his purpose into one petition.

His one petition was that God should be glorified in making Israel know him as their God, and Elijah as his servant, and in turning the heart of the people back to himself.

> There was nothing selfish, small and short-lived in this prayer, but it was cast upon large lines and looked straight away from human interest and vanity to divine glory manifesting itself in human blessing.
>
> Our prayers should not seize upon petty, personal points, but lay hold of large things and aim at divine ideals, and then we may come to pray with a prophet's passion and power.

4. A Tongue of Flame from Heaven

As lightning out of a cloudless sky leaped a tongue of flame from heaven and burnt the offering and the wood, cracked and pulverized the stones and licked up the water and the very dust of the trench. The miracle had an overpowering effect upon the people, who fell on their faces and cried, "The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God."

This miraculous answer to prayer becomes natural and easy of belief when it is set in the frame of its national environment and spiritual purpose.

A great crisis in the history of the chosen people called for and justified an extraordinary manifestation of the divine presence and power in order to save the world from the degradation of idolatry.

Thus fell the immoral and shameless worship of a licentious heathen god in Israel, and thus the chosen people were recovered to the true and pure worship.

Christianity has its mighty works that attest its divine origin, and its Lord is declared to be the Son of God with power by his resurrection from the dead. It has its fire from heaven and cleanses into purity everything it touches and penetrates.

It is true that dark masses of evil still blot and burden the face of Christendom, false prophets abound in Christian lands, and at times our faith may grow dim in all this darkness. But we are to judge Christianity by its own proper works and not by the evils of the world that persist in its presence.

5. The False Prophets Slain

The great trial had a tragic ending. At Elijah's command the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal were hurried down to the plain, and the Kishon was crimsoned with their blood; not one of them escaped.

Is this the way to deal with false prophets in our day? That depends.

Governments in the Great War did not hesitate to imprison and even put to death men that were playing false to their country and giving comfort and aid to the enemy. Authorities cannot be too nice about the way they deal with traitors, by whatever name they call themselves or even however conscientious they may be, who yet in effect stab in the back the men who are going out to lay down their lives in defence of liberty and right

Rough occasions demand rough usage.

When life is at stake we do not hesitate to use any right means, however severe, that we regard necessary to a righteous end. On this principle we may in a measure justify Elijah for his procedure on this occasion.

These false prophets were no ordinary heretics exercising their rightful liberty of thought and conscience, but were grossly immoral men who by their teaching and practice were fatally corrupting both the church and the nation.

Nevertheless this way of dealing with false prophets in religion has been outgrown. Death for heresy has had its day, and our weapons on this field are not carnal but spiritual.

But we still have false prophets and some of them are as unclean in their doctrines and deeds as the priests of Baal. They swarm in heathen countries and infest Christian lands and especially cities, and they imperil our morals and religion and whole social order. Shallow and foolish people that are ready to run after every self-styled prophet are especially susceptible to their wiles.

We also have great vices and cancers of social injustice in our Christian world which we must ever fight as we would fight the devil himself. We must put on the whole armour of God and call down the fire of God's Spirit that we may rid our land of these evils and win the victory of righteousness.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. Give some account of the character of Ahab and of Elijah.
2. What tests may we use to distinguish false from true religion?
3. Name some elements of strength and of weakness in our prayers.
4. Does any fire come down from heaven today to burn up evil?
5. May we ever use force in defence of righteousness, and, if so, when?

LESSON III.—APRIL 20

ELISHA: TEACHER AND STATESMAN

What Elisha Meant to His Nation

Golden Text: Be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good. Romans 12:21.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 34:1-8.

Lesson Material: I Kings 19:15-21; II Kings 2—10; 13:14-21.

Lesson Text: II Kings 6:15-23

15 And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, a host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do?

16 And he answered, Fear not: for they that *be* with us *are* more than they that *be* with them.

17 And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain *was* full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.

18 And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the LORD, and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness. And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha.

19 ¶ And Elisha said unto them, This *is* not the way, neither *is* this the city: follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek. But he led them to Samaria.

20 And it came to pass, when they were come into Samaria, that Elisha said, LORD, open the eyes of these *men*, that they may see And the LORD opened their eyes, and they saw; and, behold, *they were* in the midst of Samaria.

21 And the king of Israel said unto Elisha, when he saw them, My father, shall I smite *them?* shall I smite *them?*

22 And he answered, Thou shalt not smite *them:* wouldst thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow? set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master.

23 And he prepared great provision for them: and when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away, and they went to their master. So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. *The Prophet Saves the King.*
2. *A King Thinks He Has Caught the Prophet.*
3. *A Frightened Servant.*
4. *The Vision of the Unseen Armies of God.*
5. *Strange Treatment of a Captured Enemy.*

Elijah has passed and Elisha is his successor and the prophet in Israel. A chronic state of warfare existed between Israel and Syria on the north. The king of Syria was about to invade Israel and, after holding a council of war with his generals, determined to pitch his camp at a certain point.

1. The Prophet Saves the King

At this juncture Elisha warned king Jehoram of Israel in a message in which he said, "Beware that thou pass not such a place; for thither the Syrians are come down" (6:9).

There is a ministry of warning in our world thickset with pitfalls of danger and destruction.

The red light swung across the track of the midnight express warns the engineer to stop, and many are the ministers and messages that warn us of danger ahead.

It is not courage, but rashness and folly that treats such admonitions with indifference and defiance.

The king of Israel followed the directions of Elisha, and was delivered several times. The prophet's predictions came to pass and his warning worked. That quiet gentle man sitting in his humble home thwarted hostile armies and saved the king.

It pays to follow the advice of a prophet.

The teacher, physician, preacher, thinker, statesman may have foresight and wisdom that goes beyond our vision and may tell us things to come and keep our feet in a safe path. Though his warning may spoil our plans and cut into our cherished ambition, yet it will save us from defeat and work out our larger welfare.

The prophet's clarified heavenly insight can see deeper than our clogged earthly sight, and the ambushed enemies are always where he says they are. If we obey him we shall escape them.

The Bible never warns us against fictitious enemies or hangs out false signals of danger. When we follow its wisdom and warnings we shall be saved, not only once or twice, but every time. These old-fashioned directions are still the sure way of deliverance.

The heart of the king of Syria was troubled at this strange miscarriage of his plans. His wisest counsels and most cunning schemes came to naught, he found himself baffled and thwarted at every point, and yet he could not discover the cause. There was always in the problem an unknown quantity which he could not calculate and control, an unseen enemy mocked him, a spirit hand turned all things against him. He was environed and caught in mystery, and uncertainty terrified him.

There is always in human affairs an element that the human mind cannot foresee, a higher power that plays with human plans.

Napoleon said that God is always on the side of the heaviest battalions, but many a battle has disproved the proposition, and Victor Hugo enumerates several trivial providential happenings that conspired to precipitate the disaster at Waterloo and caused Napoleon's star to shoot madly from its sphere.

Life is too complex and full of invisible forces for us to control it. We must leave room for a hidden Hand, a divine Purpose, a sovereign Ruler. No plan is complete until we have taken counsel with God, and the secret of success is to get into the current of his will.

2. A King Thinks He Has Caught the Prophet

The perplexed Syrian king began to suspect treachery in his own camp and inquired, "Will ye not show me which of us is for the king of Israel?

A very pertinent question, for the cause of our weakness may be within, among ourselves, as well as without, among our enemies.

When a man is being baffled and defeated in life he may well inquire whether the trouble is not in himself rather than in his circumstances.

A negative answer, however, was given in this case, and the hidden cause was located elsewhere. "Nay, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king that is in Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber."

Through hearing reports of his words or shrewd foresight or supernatural revelation, the prophet was able to hit upon the Syrian king's plans and thus thwarted him. The King evidently talked too much. After all, the

spy was in his own camp and he was defeating himself, for his loose words stole out of his bedchamber into far-off ears and compassed his own ruin.

Many a man lets words slip out of him, even out of his most private talk, that reach unintended ears and turn up against him in unexpected ways.

Evil exhalations steal out of many a man's heart to blight his reputation and baffle his plan, while he wonders whose hand is against him.

The king had a ready remedy for this trouble: "Go and see where he is, that I may send and fetch him." Catch that prophet and bring him to me!

The king believed that if he could only catch and kill the prophet he would catch the prophet's ideas and kill his influence: a theory of dealing with prophets that has not yet wholly died out of the world.

That night a swarm of soldiers and horses and chariots settled down around Dothan, and the prophet was trapped. The king had his man! What chance had this farmer-prophet with no other weapon than a sheepskin mantle, to defend himself or escape?

The Syrian king thus put his trust in horses and chariots against a prophet's power.

He believed that material forces are mightier than spiritual influences. Is not this old heathen heresy still lurking in our minds and hearts?

The magnificence and might of the material civilization in which we are environed overwhelm us with a sense of its power. We come insensibly to believe that the forces that created all this splendid fabric can do anything.

We begin to have more faith in steam than in spirit, in guns than in goodness, in a strong arm and a mailed fist than in a pure heart. And thus we come to have the heathen trust " in reeking tube and iron shard," and forget that it is " not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."

3. A Frightened Servant

The next morning when the prophet and his servant rose early and walked forth, they saw the town beleaguered with horses and chariots.

The servant was badly scared and exclaimed, "Alas, my master! how shall we do?"

The young Jew took the same view of these horses and chariots as did the Syrian king; he thought they settled the question of the prophet's capture, and so his fright was just as great as the king's faith.

How often is our judgment decided and our hearts made to tremble by a display of force against us? We, too, quail before material mass and wonder what we shall do.

But the prophet saw deeper and took a different view. "Fear not," he said: "for they that be with us are more than they that be with them."

What brave words are these, what spiritual insight do they display, how like do they sound to a bold utterance of Paul or a calm saying of Jesus!

The young man was trusting appearances and did not have the insight to see divine resources and defences; he was frightened by the things that are seen and could not penetrate to the things that are not seen.

When we count up the forces that are against us in the way of righteousness, we find they are only man plus the devil, but when we count up the forces that are for us, we find they are man plus God. On which side, then, lies the majority and will rest the victory? If God be for us, who can be against us?

4. The Vision of the Unseen Armies of God

Then the prophet prayed for his servant that his eyes might be opened that he might see. And the Lord opened his eyes, "and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."

The veil was parted and he was given a glimpse into the spiritual world.

Invisible forces started forth into form and became a blazing host. The unseen armies of God pitched their tents on that mountain side and rolled their fiery chariots into view.

The vision only revealed what always exists. The lightning that leaps out of the cloud in a vivid bolt of fire all the while lay invisibly leashed in the sky. If we had senses sufficiently refined and exquisite, we could see it before it flashes upon us.

God's world is full of flaming forces, angels, ministering spirits, that we in our earthliness and blindness cannot see; but are there all the same and all the while. At times we become strangely conscious of them, and they almost tremble upon our sight.

This unseen world is the real world of which this material world is only the shadow. There reside the master forces, there God marshals his armies for the defence of his children.

To catch sight of that world our vision should be clarified and strained, behind that veil our anchor should be cast. "Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things." "Look not at the things which are seen but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

5. Strange Treatment of a Captured Enemy

Deliverance was now wrought. In answer to Elisha's prayer, the Syrians were smitten with blindness, or rather, as the word means, with dazzled bewilderment and hallucination. It was as though the same splendor that on one side appeared as shining horses and chariots, on the other appeared as a burst of fire that smote men blind, or dazzled them so that they knew not where they were.

God wields a two-edged sword and its flash is either life or death according as we are on the right or the wrong side of it.

Elisha now had his enemies in his power and might have destroyed them in their helplessness, but he was of a different temper. He led the bewildered captives to the king of Israel, who would have murdered them in cold blood, but Elisha showed them mercy and ordered that they be fed and sent back to their king.

Those that came forth to capture the prophet had their lives spared by the prophet and went home blessed by his hand.

This is a fine illustration of the just and humane spirit that should govern us in our relations with men of other races and nations. Racial and national prejudices and hatred, friction and strife, are among the most frequent and deepest causes of trouble in our world, leading us to treat with ignominy and injustice foreigners amongst us and at times breaking out in international discord and great wars. The spirit of the Good Samaritan, born of the common blood in all our veins and of the Spirit of God in our hearts, should restrain us from any such inhumanity and bind all people into brotherhood.

Such a spirit of justice and humanity in our nation is a better national defence against foreign injustice and war than all the warships we can build.

The same spirit of just and brotherly treatment should pervade our industrial relations and our whole social order, and this will often solve problems and straighten out the tangles of labor and capital and give us peace and prosperity when harsher means and methods may make the last state worse than the first. The Master gave us the right teaching on this subject (Matt. 5:43–48).

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. Do we have prophets in our day and what service do they render us?
2. In what ways may some men try to muzzle our prophets?
3. Is fear a right motive in our lives and to what extent should we be governed by it?
4. What part do invisible forces play in the physical universe and in our lives?
5. How should we treat our enemies?

LESSON IV.—APRIL 27

AMOS AND HOSEA PLEADING FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

Sins That Destroyed Israel

Golden Text: Hate the evil, and love the good. Amos 5:15.

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 55:5-13.

Lesson Material: Amos and Hosea.

Lesson Text: Amos 6:1–6; Hosea 6:1–6

Woe to them *that are* at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, *which are* named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came!
2 Pass ye unto Calneh, and see; and from thence go ye to Hamath the great: then go down to Gath of the Philistines: *be they* better than these kingdoms? or their border greater than your border?
3 Ye that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near;
4 That lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall;
5 That chant to the sound of the viol, *and* invent to themselves instruments of music, like David;
6 That drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.

Come, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up.
2 After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight.
3 Then shall we know, *if* we follow on to know the LORD: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter *and* former rain unto the earth.
4 ¶ O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness *is* as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away.
5 Therefore have I hewed *them* by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth: and thy judgments *are as* the light *that* goeth forth.
6 For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. ***Pride in High Places.***
2. ***Putting Off the Evil Day of Judgment.***
3. ***Rioting in Sensuality.***
4. ***Coming Captivity.***
5. ***Following on to Know the Lord.***
6. ***Mercy and Not Sacrifice.***

Amos was another farmer-prophet who belonged to the southern kingdom of Judah but traveled into the northern kingdom and there preached in blunt language and fierce invective against the evils of his time.

Hosea lived a little later in the kingdom of Israel in the same moral and social conditions.

It was a time of national decay, following the sudden expansion in territory and wealth under Jeroboam II, and may be dated 760-730 B. C., the fall of Samaria ending the northern kingdom taking place in 722 B. C. The rich grew richer out of the profiteering of the time, the poor were exploited, and sensuality ran riot.

It was the phosphorescence of decay that preceded the death that ended in the grave of captivity in Babylon.

1. Pride in High Places

Amos lets loose a bolt of lightning against the capitals of the two kingdoms. "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named the chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came!"

Capitals of nations are the centers of their power and pride, wealth and luxury and vice, and these two cities had notoriously attained to this bad eminence.

They sat upon their mountain heights and looked down in disdain on all the world. They were the chief of these two kingdoms, the fine rich blossoms of which the common people were only stalks and roots.

To them, also, the house of Israel came, bringing treasures in the form of heavy taxes and taking away such justice as bribes could buy. In these circumstances the rulers in Jerusalem and Samaria gave themselves up to luxury and ease and cared not for God or man.

Amos the cowherd was a bold prophet and struck high.

Standing down among the common people, he looked up to these mountain tops and saw the pride with which they were crowned; and he bravely smote them with his burning shafts of condemnation and scorn.

High places are apt to breed a haughty spirit and a love of luxury and ease.

Pride is one of the dangers of prosperity. Nowhere else is humility more protective, as well as more beautiful, than in places of power. The day that a man begins to relax his faithfulness and diligence and take his ease may mark the beginning of his decline.

The preacher must often look up and strike sin in high places.

The fact that we live in Jerusalem or Samaria will not save us from condemnation and retribution in the day of judgment. Around the loftiest heights of position and privilege and power divine judgment beats and burns with the fiercest intensity.

The first may be last. There are many at ease in the church, and they need to take heed lest, having been exalted unto heaven, they may be cast down to hell.

The prophet warns Jerusalem and Samaria by pointing them to the fate of neighboring heathen cities that were great and powerful and yet had fallen under the conqueror's hand. The people of Jerusalem and Samaria looking out from their mountain heights could see the woeful work of haughtiness and luxury and ease born of prosperity and pride.

We need not look far to see the same results. Across the sea is a scene of desolation and ruin wrought by domineering pride and power, and such retribution should warn us that the God of nations is against them that do evil and forget him.

2. Putting Off the Evil Day of Judgment

The prophet points out one of the temptations that were leading the people of Israel to destruction. "Ye that put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near."

The corrupt rulers, living in a riot of revelry, were flattering themselves that the day of judgment was far off and would never overtake them.

This has ever been a soothing benumbing thought to evil doers. "After us the deluge," was a current saying among the French aristocracy during the period preceding the Revolution.

This fallacy of the future lures men into all kinds of sin.

Because judgment does not come with one swift stride, it is pushed forward far into the future whence it is thought it will never come, or will come so tardily that it will not catch us.

One of the dangers of debt is that it makes present possession so quick and easy and seems to put payment so far off. The wine cup wreathes itself in the same rosy deception. Its foam and sparkle and cheer are a present enjoyment, but a drunkard's grave is far away out of sight. The pleasures of sin are near and sure, but its penalty is distant and uncertain. Therefore we gaily float on its smooth, smiling stream and refuse to see and hear the dreadful cataract over which it pours.

This glittering falsehood as to the future is the devil's bait with which he decoys multitudes to destruction.

A safeguard against it is the power and habit of looking ahead and considering the end. It is the farther end of every sin that we should consider. The first end may be sweet: the last is bitter and will burn forever.

3. Rioting in Sensuality

The prophet now depicts the painted sins of these luxurious Israelites in realistic colors. Upon beds inlaid with ivory they stretched themselves in languid laziness and ease. Ordinary meat from the market was not tender enough for their tables, but the flocks were robbed of their lambs, and the stalls of their calves that their dainty appetites might be gratified. They wove around their pleasures the witchery of song and dance. They drank wine in bowls—ordinary cups and goblets would not do for them: they must have bowls in which they could drown themselves in seas of wine. They guzzled down intoxicating drink in disgusting greediness. The costliest perfumed ointments were used to soften and scent their delicate flesh.

The whole description is a picture of luxurious sensual gratification and selfishness and is true to similar aspects of our modern life.

We have been piling up wealth in our land in shining heaps, compared with which all the wealth of these ancient cities was only a handful of dust, and out of this rich soil have been growing all the gorgeous scarlet blossoms

and rank weeds of ease and luxury and voluptuousness. We are noted as a pleasure-loving people and are growing mad for amusements. Ostentatious and often vulgar display of wealth in fashion and pleasure, the incessant search for excitement, the constant craving for a crowd and itching for a new thrill, the dance hall and theatre, the desire to turn all life into a picnic and moving picture show—all these symptoms of our modern life may well excite our anxiety and alarm. The same seeds of decay were rife in the Roman Empire: and great was the fall of it.

Wealth lavished upon personal indulgence and luxury is a social waste. The rich have no right to drain off the productive resources of society to gratify their selfish desires.

Such use of wealth breeds social discontent and sows seeds of socialism and anarchy. Private wealth is a public trust and should be so used that it will serve the greatest good of the greatest number.

4. Coming Captivity

The prophet, having piled up this terrible indictment, now pronounces judgment: "Therefore shall they go captive with the first that go captive, and the banquet of them that stretched themselves shall be removed."

Captivity was an awful fate and fear to the Jews.

The iron-hearted, stony-faced Assyrians, those dreadful oppressors of the East, were already beating against the borders of Israel and threatening to break through and carry its inhabitants to their far-off prison beyond the great river. The Jews quailed in their hearts and became as dead men at this thought.

Amos plumped this judgment right at them.

They would be pulled off their ivory couches and stripped of their embroidered robes and hurried away from their feasting and dancing, and, fettered with chains, would march across a thousand miles of hot desert sand into ignominious and cruel slavery.

Captivity is the end of all sin. Whatever its form, whether it is pride or passion or wine, it enslaves the mind and heart and will. It may not put chains on the hands, but it binds the soul in a bond-

age more abject and fatal than the slavemaster's lash. Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin; but if the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.

5. Following on to Know the Lord

Hosea deals with the same general situation as Amos and in the same general way. Apostate Ephraim "shall be desolate," and upon the princes of Judah will Jehovah pour out his wrath. In the opening verses of the passage in our lesson Israel is called to repentance with a promise of healing and forgiveness. Jehovah hath smitten, but he will bind up. After two days and three he will revive his wayward people and raise them up in newness of life.

"Then shall we know," responds the hopeful people, "if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth."

This is a beautiful and comforting picture of the fruits of repentance and restored faith and fellowship inserted in the midst of a dark background of apostasy and guilt.

That we shall know if we follow on to know the Lord is the same principle as that contained in the saying of Jesus, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself," a principle that has been condensed into the title and luminously worked out in the argument of Frederick W. Robertson's famous sermon on "Obedience the Organ of Spiritual Knowledge."

In intellectual matters the reason plays a supreme part, but in practical matters, especially in the field of morals and religion, obedience is the main path that leads us into light and life.

We know things clearly and deeply only as we do them, and when we follow on in the path of obedience as far as we know the Lord, we shall find our way still further along the path into a clear knowledge of him and assurance of his love and care.

6. Mercy and Sacrifice

The prophet quickly returns to the falling away of Ephraim and Judah, for their goodness was only a momentary impulse as evanescent as the morning cloud and the early dew.

They were strong on ritual but weak in righteousness.

They made much of the outward ordinances and performances of religion, but they were woefully deficient in its inward spirit and real fruits. It is a singular fact that in all ages and religions inward spiritual decadence descending into moral rottenness flowers out into the most gorgeous ritualism.

But God has no use or respect for sacrifice that takes the place of mercy. The odor of an offering upon the altar becomes an offence to him when it is not the symbolic incense of a spirit of love and service.

It was hard for the Israelites to learn the great truth of the spirituality of religion, and this lesson is still difficult for us. We are much disposed to think that if we go to church and take part in a beautiful service and feel good, we are good. But such feeling may be as the morning cloud and early dew and fade away into forgetfulness and worldliness.

The true sacrifice God wants is a broken and a contrite heart.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. Give some account of the condition of Israel in its last days.
2. Are there signs in our life of false ease in high places?
3. In what ways may we put off the day of judgment?
4. In what ways is sensuality manifesting itself in our social life?
5. Illustrate how obedience is the organ of spiritual knowledge.
6. What is the right relation of ritual to religion?

LESSON V.—MAY 4

THE ASSYRIAN EXILE OF ISRAEL

Lessons from Israel's Downfall

Golden Text: I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word. Psalm 119:16.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 119:33-40.

Lesson Material: II Kings 11—17

Lesson Text: II Kings 17:9–18

9 And the children of Israel did secretly *those* things that *were* not right against the LORD their God, and they built them high places in all their cities, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city.

10 And they set them up images and groves in every high hill, and under every green tree:

11 And there they burnt incense in all the high places, as *did* the heathen whom the LORD carried away before them; and wrought wicked things to provoke the LORD to anger:

12 For they served idols, whereof the LORD had said unto them, Ye shall not do this thing.

13 Yet the LORD testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, *and by* all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments *and* my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets.

14 Notwithstanding, they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the neck of their fathers, that did not believe in the LORD their God.

15 And they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and his testimonies which he testified against them; and they followed vanity, and became vain, and went after the heathen that *were* round about them, *concerning* whom the LORD had charged them, that they should not do like them.

16 And they left all the commandments of the LORD their God, and made them molten images, *even* two calves, and made a grove, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served Baal.

17 And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger.

18 Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight: there was none left but the tribe of Judah only.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. Secret Sinning.
2. Religious Corruption.

3. Sinning Without Excuse.
4. A Bad Bargain.
5. The Anger of the Lord.

We have come to the downfall of the kingdom of Israel. Long decay had undermined its foundations, rottenness at the root had prepared the way for its mighty crash into the pit of captivity.

Assassination of kings spatters blood upon the pages of this history from Jeroboam II to Hosea, the last king of Israel. Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, made Hosea a vassal and, upon his revolt, took him captive and besieged Samaria.

On his death the terrible Sargon took up the siege, captured the city, and carried the ten tribes into captivity, where they were lost to view.

The present lesson uncovers the roots that bore the scarlet blossoms and bitter fruit of slavery on the banks of the Tigris.

1. Secret Sinning

The first point in the passage penetrates down to the tap-root of the whole matter. "The children of Israel did secretly those things that were not right."

Things not right! This is the cause of all our trouble.

Right is the law of life, the root that can grow and blossom only into the beautiful and the good. Right is the foundation of the universe and the eternal throne of God that cannot be shaken. As long as we stand upon the right, our spirits cannot be moved, though our mortal bodies may be ground to powder.

But the moment we shift from things right to things not right, we slip from rock to sand. Though things not right may seem solid and promise security, yet they are sinking under us and in due time our feet shall slide.

Every time we do a thing not right we put a rotten stone into our foundation, or a worm-eaten piece of timber into the framework of our life that may one day let the roof down upon our heads; or we put a drop of poison into the root of our life that may diffuse its bitterness through all its leaves and fruits.

The children of Israel thought they were having a good time while they were doing things not right, but all the while they were digging the grave of their own captivity; and we may engage in the same business with the same result.

They also thought they were safe in their evil doing because they were doing it secretly. What a strange fascination does this word "secretly" throw over our wrong doing!

Sin loves secrecy. We seem to think that the wrong is not in doing things not right, but in being found out.

Evil doers think that as the night blots out all colors, so secrecy blots out all moral distinctions.

But the night is as the day to God and to every pure mind. His eye burns through the darkness and all things are naked before him. What we do in secret shall at last be blazoned against us in the noon-day. Some tell-tale sign or work or subtle change of feature will blab. Nature will turn detective and tell the dreadful secret.

Let us not be so blind or foolish as to think that we can ever hide our sin, for God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.

2. Religious Corruption

The sin of the Israelites took the form of religious corruption. They built high places for forbidden worship from the cities out to the most lonely tower of a watchman that guarded vineyards and flocks. They set up groves of Asherim that were carved pillars used in the licentious worship of the Phenician goddess Ashera. They burned incense in these high places, as did the heathen nations whom the Lord had carried away before them, and wrought wicked things to provoke the Lord to anger. They worshipped idols, whereof the Lord had said unto them, Ye shall not do this thing.

Thus the mountain tops of the holy land, that had been consecrated to pure worship and that were to be kissed by the feet of the Son of God, smoked with the impure incense of licentious heathen worship.

The best things, when perverted, become the worst things. Wealth, learning, art, all the appliances and achievements of our

civilization, which when rightly used are potent ministers of good to serve and enrich and beautify our life, when wrongly used become cunning and powerful instruments of evil to degrade and torment it.

Worship, being the highest and holiest means of good that may lift us to the loftiest summit of blessing, when perverted may cast us down into the lowest depths of degradation.

3. Sinning Without Excuse

The people of Israel and Judah were without excuse, because the Lord had testified against them. They could not plead that they lived in heathen darkness and knew no better, that they were simply following the faith of their fathers and could not do otherwise. They were not born of heathen blood, heredity was not sending them to hell.

The Lord had testified against them by every prophet from Moses down to the preachers of their own day.

Had not Hosea exposed and scorched their sins with the fires of his burning words? And had not the rough but righteous cowherd of Tekoa denounced the sleek, scented sinners of Jerusalem and Samaria? Was not Isaiah even now unburdening his great soul of its righteous indignation against them? They were warned to turn from their evil ways and urged to keep the commandments according to the law which had been given unto their fathers.

The law was thus shown to be hereditary in their land and their own fathers were raised up as witnesses against them. The Lord had poured his light upon them in such clearness and fulness that they could not help but see unless they were wilfully blind. So they were without excuse.

We are in the same position with intensified light and responsibility. We have the testimony of the prophets, the Bible with light beaming from every page revealing the will and ways of God. We have the words of Jesus, who spake as never man spake and flooded our life with heavenly light.

4. A Bad Bargain

Over against the light that fell upon Israel is set their disobedience. They hardened their necks, a figure drawn from the stubbornness of oxen

that will not accept and bear the yoke, but stiffen their necks against it. They annulled the covenant made with their fathers and thus broke connection with the past and disowned their ancestral faith.

All this they did, not from the tremendous pull of heredity or from the force of circumstances, but of their own free will. They were offered the good, and they deliberately rejected it.

The root of our disobedience is always self-will. Let us not roll the blame of our evil doing off on others or on our circumstances, but take it home to our own bosom where it was born and where it belongs.

The Israelites might have urged some reason for the rejection of Jehovah's commandments if they had found something better, but they followed vanity and became vain. They gave up God for idols, the infinite for nothingness.

This is the bad bargain we always make when we exchange God's will for our way.

In his righteous service we get something substantial and lasting, good fruits, solid character, life richer and more abundant. But in our sinful ways we sow to the wind and shall at last reap the whirlwind: emptiness and destruction raised to the second power.

The apostate Israelites not only did evil themselves, but they caused their sons and daughters to pass through the fire and thus inflicted on them a horrible fate.

Parents cannot sin without rolling evil consequences upon their children; the coils of their evil habits encircle and constrict the next generation.

The awful fires of sin that some parents kindle burn up their own sons and daughters.

The final degradation of these idolaters is indicated in the fact that they "sold themselves to do evil." As men in ancient times could sell themselves into slavery, so these Israelites sold themselves into the bondage of wickedness. Once in, there was no getting out.

The slavery of sin is an awful fact, ever riveting its shackles tighter until its fetters become a finality which strong crying and tears cannot break and the soul is lost in eternal sin.

5. The Anger of the Lord

The retributive result of all this evil is now set down: "Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight: there was none left but the tribe of Judah only."

That is a logical and inevitable "therefore." Never imagine that sin will stop with itself: there is always a "therefore" that comes after it. God never forgets and his justice never sleeps.

The Lord was angry: anger is the other side of love and its possibility is present in every right character and it is an element of the divine nature. The same mellow sunshine that sifts down through the air in silken softness and gently kisses and warms the world, when concentrated through a lens, becomes a fierce beam that will burn flesh and melt iron.

The Bible contains three definitions of God: "God is spirit"; "God is love"; "God is a consuming fire." This trinity of the divine nature involves no contradiction, for these elements blend into unity, as caloric, luminiferous and chemic waves coalesce into one white light.

God's anger against Israel was not blind passion that struck wild blows, but it expressed itself in logical action: he "removed them out of his sight."

Is not this the necessary result of all sin?

Sin works separation everywhere, introducing suspicion and strife into all social relations, splitting friendships and families and societies and nations apart, and working disruption and enmity.

As sin drives a wedge of separation between man and man, much more does it do so between man and God.

It unfits the soul for fellowship with God and sends it out in disgrace from his presence. "Ever to be with the Lord" is heaven, "removed out of his sight" is hell.

So ended the ten tribes whose splendid wickedness lighted their way down into final captivity and extinction.

> "There was none left," and yet there remained still one root in the cleft of the Judean rocks that might again sprout and bloom, for Judah persisted as the hope of the nation and out of this stalk at length came the Messiah.

The downfall of Israel in view of its whole history is seen to have been no accident or blind fate, but the long and slow outgrowth and retribution of righteous and inexorable moral law. This kingdom was born in rebellion and at once adopted a false and immoral religion and persistently trod the way of political intrigue and social corruption and was thus from the beginning heading towards the precipice over which it at last plunged as irresistibly as Niagara, having arrived at its brink, can be arrested by no human hand, but must go thundering down.

> Nations as truly as individuals are subject to moral laws, and the wages of national transgression is death. History is a vast graveyard, and on its tombstones is carved the ever repeated epitaph: "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God."

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. Why are "things not right" so destructive in our lives?
2. Why is religious corruption the worst form of sin?
3. What did Jesus teach about sinning against light?
4. Name some bad moral bargains we may make in our life?
5. How can a loving God hate evil?

II. HISTORY OF JUDAH, THE SOUTHERN KINGDOM

LESSON VI.—MAY 11

JEHOIADA'S VICTORY OVER BAAL

What Jehoiada Meant to Judah

Golden Text: Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Ephesians 6:10.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 1.

Lesson Material: I Kings 14:21—15:24; II Kings 11—12.

Lesson Text: II Kings 11:1–4, 11–18

And when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the seed royal.
2 But Jehosheba, the daughter of king Joram, sister of Ahaziah, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him from among the king's sons *which were* slain; and they hid him, *even* him and his nurse, in the bedchamber from Athaliah, so that he was not slain.
3 And he was with her hid in the house of the LORD six years. And Athaliah did reign over the land.
4 ¶ And the seventh year Jehoiada sent and fetched the rulers over hundreds, with the captains and the guard, and brought them to him into the house of the LORD, and made a covenant with them, and took an oath of them in the house of the LORD, and shewed them the king's son.

11 And the guard stood, every man with his weapons in his hand, round about the king, from the right corner of the temple to the left corner of the temple, *along* by the altar and the temple.
12 And he brought forth the king's son, and put the crown upon him, and *gave him* the testimony; and they made him king, and anointed him; and they clapped their hands, and said, God save the king.
13 ¶ And when Athaliah heard the noise of the guard *and* of the people, she came to the people into the temple of the LORD.
14 And when she looked, behold, the king stood by a pillar, as the manner *was*, and the princes and the trumpeters by the king, and all the people of the land rejoiced, and blew with trumpets: and Athaliah rent her clothes and cried, Treason, treason.
15 But Jehoiada the priest commanded the captains of the hundreds, the officers of the host, and said unto them, Have her forth without the ranges; and him that followeth her kill with the sword. For the priest had said, Let her not be slain in the house of the LORD.
16 And they laid hands on her; and she went by the way by the which the horses came into the king's house: and there was she slain.

17 ¶ And Jehoiada made a covenant between the LORD and the king and the people, that they should be the LORD'S people; between the king also and the people.
18 And all the people of the land went into the house of Baal, and brake it down; his altars and his images brake they in pieces thoroughly, and slew Mattan the priest of Baal before the altars. And the priest appointed officers over the house of the LORD.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. A Murderous Queen.
2. Getting Ready for Action.
3. The Call to Arms.
4. The Coronation.
5. The Equipment of the King.
6. The Tragic End of the Queen.

We pass from the fallen northern kingdom of Israel to the southern kingdom of Judah, which was now heading towards the same pit of captivity. The lesson introduces us into one of the very darkest periods in the history of Judah. Jehoshaphat, the good king of Judah, had made the mistake of marrying his son Joram to Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab, the king of Israel, and Jezebel, his wicked Phenician wife. Athaliah was able to infect Judah with the licentious Baal worship as her mother had infected Israel. Joram was succeeded by his son Ahaziah, who, after a reign of one year, was slain by Jehu, king of Israel, who was making a clean sweep of Baal worshipers.

1. A Murderous Queen

This left Athaliah to take possession of the throne. She had all the masculine courage and fierce ambition of her mother Jezebel and was ready for every murderous means to attain her end.

> In order that she might hold the throne she determined to sweep all possible claimants to it out of her way, and so she destroyed all the seed royal, including her own grandchildren.

One grandchild, however, was preserved from her wrath. Jehosheba, the daughter of king Joram and sister of Ahaziah and the wife of Jehoiada the high priest, secretly took Joash, an infant son of Ahaziah, and hid him away in the temple, where he was kept in seclusion six years.

Thus Providence watched over this child and kept it for its great future.

With a powerful and malignant tigress seeking its life it was yet secure, even as long afterward the Babe of Bethlehem was safe against the sword of Herod when it was thrust through every cradle in the town. No evil could come nigh it because God was round about it.

Every child is in a sense under the watch and care of Providence. The little children of the world are precious to the great Father.

All children also are exposed to evil and to enemies. There are environments, companions, books, and other temptations that are contamination and death to children. As far as possible we should shield them from evil influences and train them up in purity and strength of character.

2. Getting Ready for Action

At length the time came when the young king should be put upon the throne. When he was seven years old the high priest Jehoiada (his uncle by marriage) took action. He called the captains of the royal guards into the temple, showed them the king's son, made a solemn covenant with them and took an oath of them.

These captains and the soldiers were evidently faithful worshipers of Jehovah and could be trusted.

This movement was started and sealed in the house of God and was a religious reformation. We should beware of any movement which we cannot take into the church and start with the divine blessing.

These captains were to station part of their men around the royal residence to prevent any one from going out or in who would interfere with the plan, and part were to be stationed around the temple to guard the new king.

Orders were given the officers to slay any one who attempted to pass within the ranks of the guards.

The high priest was a man of foresight and plan. He knew how to arrange a campaign and handle soldiers. He did not simply depend on divine action, but he used human means.

The priest at times must be a soldier and know how to fight. All Christian workers are engaged in a campaign against evil and should study the means and know how to use the proper arms. We wrestle not against flesh and blood only, but with spiritual hosts of wickedness, and we should have on the whole armor of God.

3. The Call to Arms

The captains gave their commands and the soldiers wheeled into their places. "And the guard stood, every man with his weapons in his hand, round about the king."

That is the true soldierly attitude, prepared and expectant.

Every one should stand in that attitude in his place of duty: to shoot, if shooting is his duty; to work, if working is his task; to teach or preach or pray, if that is his calling.

Too many men are standing around with no weapon or tool in their hands.

The priest now delivered to the captains "king David's spears and shields, that were in the temple of the Lord" (verse 10).

This was a deeply significant act and masterly stroke of policy.

It armed these men with king David's weapons. How their hearts would thrill and what excitement and inspiration would surge through them as their hands touched these historic spears and shields! It was as though David himself were come back to them and was fighting with them.

This meant that their cause was David's cause, they were about to revive the same worship that David established, they were going to be true to his faith.

Ancestral strength is ever sleeping in a nation's heart and will awake in the hour of trial. Let America be invaded or wronged and Washington and Lincoln and Grant and Lee will arise from their tombs to repel the invader or right the wrong, and let England be attacked and Cromwell and Wellington will spring to its defence.

Let us keep our fathers' weapons in our hands. We have to fight the same enemies and battles they fought, and we cannot find better weapons than they used.

The Word of God and prayer, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, what weapons are these! Our fathers used them, and we should have them in our hands and with them win the victory.

4. The Coronation

Jehoiada now brought the boy king out and the coronation ceremony was performed. A crown was put on his head, and the people clapped their hands and shouted, "God save the king."

This is the ancient way of crowning a king, and it is proper that kings and presidents should be inducted into their high office with fitting ceremonies.

It is no part of our republican form of government to disparage the royal form. All the great historic modes of government have had their place and use, and each is to be honored in its time. "Honor the king," says Paul, and the advice is still good in this age.

We are proud of our constitutional republic, and this is the highest type of government for those who are fitted for it, but it would not suit and would not work among all the peoples of the world.

As Christians, however, we are all kings unto God and are to be crowned. Joash received a crown, possibly a jeweled circlet of gold, but every one of us should wear a crown of righteousness that is far more precious and radiant than any crown of gold, though it be thickly encrusted with gems.

The jewels that should shine in our crown are truth and trust, righteousness and reverence, self-control, purity and patience and peace, goodness and gentleness, kindness and courtesy, sympathy and service and sacrifice. These make a crown more beautiful and splendid than any diadem ever worn by king or queen, and every one of us, however poor and humble, can win and wear it.

5. The Equipment of the King

In the young king's hands they placed the testimony. This doubtless was the law of Moses, the Bible as far as they had it.

It was the constitution of the Hebrew state, so that Joash was really a constitutional monarch.

The king also is subject to law. He cannot set up his own arbitrary will as the law of the kingdom, he cannot simply do as he pleases, but he is himself bound by the testimony and must carry out its requirements. For attempting to rule without obeying "the testimony" some kings have lost their kingdoms and some have lost their heads.

If the king is thus bound to observe "the testimony," much more are we. The same testimony that was placed in the hands of young Joash is put, enlarged and enriched, into our hands.

The Bible is the great Book of testimony for king and subject, president and citizen, alike. It lays down the fundamental constitution and laws of the kingdom of the human soul. In keeping its commandments there is great reward; but whosoever hates its requirements loves death.

Every boy should have this testimony placed in his hands; and so should every girl and man and woman. Not only should we have it in our hands, but also in our hearts, wrought into the texture of our habits and disposition so that it will be our spirit and speech, and in all thoughts and ways we shall keep its laws.

The young king was also anointed. The oil of anointing signifies that Joash was set apart to the kingly office, amd it also symbolized the divine grace with which he was endued for this service. Kings are set apart to their calling just as prophets are; and they need a special divine enduement to enable them to discharge their duties.

All Christians, being kings and priests unto God, need this same anointing. Every one is set apart for his special calling, whether as minister or miner, professional man or laborer. Every true line of work is a divine calling, as certainly as the ministry, and is to be entered upon and fulfilled as such.

Every one also needs a special anointing oil of grace that he may be enabled to do his work in the most efficient way with divine help. Our work is just as important in our place as is the king's work in his high place, and we should strive to be prepared for it and be faithful in it.

6. The Tragic End of the Queen

When Athaliah heard the shouting in connection with the coronation she rushed out of her palace, and when she saw the young king wearing his crown she instantly took in the situation and began frantically crying, "Treason, treason!"

Jehoida made quick work with her. At his command the soldiers seized her, hurried her off to the horses' gate or the horse stables of the palace and smothered her cries in her blood.

This was the way such things were done in that age; and some parts of the world have not yet advanced beyond this stage and process, and the pathetic cries of a Russian king and queen, hurried at midnight to their assassination, with their children, have hardly yet died out of our ears.

Athaliah embodied wickedness that was highly infectious and that had to be stamped out in death.

We do not now resort to such means of purifying religion and politics, but sin is still just as infectious and dangerous and deadly and its wages are still inevitable death in our modern world.

Reformation followed swift upon this decisive action. Jehoiada made a covenant with the people, and they went and broke into the house of Baal and smashed the idols and slew the priest of Baal before his altar and appointed officers over the house of the Lord.

Negative destruction of evil is not enough: we must follow this up with positive reformation.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. Give a sketch of the history lying back of this lesson.
2. What preparation do we need to make to combat evil?
3. When is it right for Christians to resort to the use of arms?
4. Why is the monarchical form of government dwindling today?
5. Who was Bezaleel and for what purpose was he inspired?
6. What is the greatest kingdom in the world?

LESSON VII.—MAY 18

ISAIAH AND THE ASSYRIAN CRISIS

Isaiah's Service to His Country

Golden Text: God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Psalm 46:1.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 46.

Lesson Material: II Kings 18—20; Isaiah 36—38.

Lesson Text: Isaiah 37:14, 21 23, 29, 33 36

14 ¶ And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up unto the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD.

21 ¶ Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent unto Hezekiah, saying, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Whereas thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria:
22 This *is* the word which the LORD hath spoken concerning him; The virgin, the daughter of Zion, hath despised thee, *and* laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee.
23 Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted *thy* voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? *even* against the Holy One of Israel.

29 Because thy rage against me, and thy tumult, is come up into mine ears therefore will I put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest.

33 Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it.
34 By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the LORD.
35 For I will defend this city to save it for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake.
36 Then the angel of the LORD went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they *were* all dead corpses.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. Isaiah's Message to the King.
2. The Divine Answer to the Assyrian Host.
3. A Sign of Assurance.
4. A Promise of Deliverance.
5. Swift Judgment.

Successive waves of that vast Assyrian sea of conquering power and pitiless might that stretched far eastward were now breaking over the rocky ridges of Judah.

Samaria had already been submerged, and the advancing angry waters were now surging up around Jerusalem.

Those iron-faced, stony-hearted warriors came year after year in hosts and swarms, their steel-tipped ranks all aglitter with polished metal and blazing with banners. The watchers at Jerusalem could see their advance marked by the smoke and fire of burning towns and cities.

King Hezekiah rifled the temple of its treasures and stripped the gold off its doors and pillars in order that he might send them three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold and thus try to buy them off.

But nothing could appease their insatiable spirit. At length they pitched their tents and built their camp fires around the capital city and demanded its surrender.

The parleyings between the general of the Assyrians and the chiefs of Jerusalem are intensely dramatic (chapter 36). At this point our lesson opens.

1. Isaiah's Message to King Hezekiah

When king Hezekiah heard the final demands of the enemy he went up into the temple and poured out his soul in a pleading passionate prayer before God.

Kings and presidents often come to the end of their extremity and then God is their only refuge and strength and very present help in trouble.

However, Isaiah was the real king in Jerusalem, for the prophet is often above the king in spiritual insight and grasp of the situation.

While Hezekiah was trusting to an alliance with Egypt (36:6) and was trying to bribe and buy off the invaders, Isaiah was trusting in Jehovah and his prophetic vision penetrated to future deliverance.

He sent the king an answer to his prayer. Israel had a God, the one true and living God, and this was the bulwark of his defence. Other nations

had gods of wood and stone which the Assyrians had cast into the fire, but the God of Israel could not be burned, and his right arm was never shortened that he could not save.

The fundamental fact in any nation's life and power is its God.

Does it believe in and obey the true God, or is it pervaded and controlled by some false ideal of military honor or material splendor? On this question the destiny of a nation depends. "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord;" all other national foundations are sand.

Our nation in the great crises of its history has ever poured out its heart before God in prayer, and he has heard its cry and proved himself our refuge and present help.

"Thou hast prayed—I have heard" (II Kings 19:20): here is the coöperation of the human and the divine. It is our part to pray with faith and persistence and earnestness, and it is God's part to hear.

When the human and the divine thus join their streams of thought and action and flow in the same channel, enemies will be swept back and we shall float on the tide of victory.

2. The Divine Answer to the Assyrian Host

Through the prophet the Lord's answer is conveyed to the haughty Assyrian host. "The virgin, the daughter of Zion, hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee."

Jerusalem is pictured as a virgin of innocence and beauty whose apparently defenseless weakness is walled around with impenetrable protection.

From this vantage ground she contemptuously taunts her insulters and bids them defiance.

There are times when God mocks insolent men and when scorn is our proper attitude towards enemies.

The Assyrians now have the real spirit and object of their attack disclosed and pressed upon them. "Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice, and lifted up thine eyes on high? even against the Holy One of Israel."

Those flinty-faced, defiant oppressors were doing worse than they knew. They supposed that they were simply stamping out a nest of pestilent rebels that stood in the way of the progress of their arms, whereas they were running against the invisible powers of the universe and dashing against the throne of the Holy One.

Appearances are often very deceiving as to the true contestants in and issues of a struggle.

It may look like a petty contest between a fiery southern slave-holder and a narrow-minded northern abolitionist, when in reality it is a cosmic struggle that involves giant armies and the fundamental principles of human liberty and over which God himself is watching.

In every contest in which we engage, let us make sure that the Holy One is not against us but for us.

In driving a sharp bargain or oppressing the weak or injuring the innocent, we may be thrusting at the Most High.

God has his own way of dealing with the proud Assyrian. "Because thy rage against me, and thy tumult is come up into mine ears, therefore will I put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest."

How often do human plans and power and pride come to this end? Many a man sets out to attain some prize, capture some citadel of wealth or power, or wreak vengeance on some enemy, or accomplish some worldly or evil purpose, and when he seems near the point of victory God puts a hook in his nose and a bridle in his lips and leads him back in defeat and disgrace over the way in which he came.

3. A Sign of Assurance

The divine answer now had a sign of assurance for the prophet and the people of Israel. "And this shall be a sign unto thee" (30).

God has given us many signs of his faithfulness.

All nature is written over with seals of his law and order, his goodness and truth.

He has given our faith many infallible facts to build upon, and not left us without ordinances that have crystallized our worship into tangible forms.

"Ye shall eat this year such as groweth itself; and the second year that which springeth of the same, and in the third year sow ye, and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruit thereof." The meaning is that the presence of the Assyrians had stopped agriculture that season and had practically ruined it for the next season, but the third year it would be fully restored.

The sign had in it an element of want and of waiting, but also an assurance of present subsistence and future plenty.

God's people often have appointed unto them a hard time, during which they must scrape along with wild-growing things, or with the remnants of their abundance, yet through it all they shall be kept and cared for and at last shall be brought out into a wealthy place.

Scarcity may be their allotment during the passing season, but plenty shall be their portion at last.

A foreglook was also granted into the more distant future of Israel. "And the remnant that is escaped out of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward."

The doctrine of "the remnant" was now a precious hope with Israel.

They saw the Assyrian ranks sweeping over their country with sharp knives that cut down all in their path. They knew that they could not escape.

But they were promised a remnant that should be left as a root to bury itself deep in the earth and shoot up and burst into blossom and bear fruit.

God fulfilled that hope. A remnant was brought back from the Babylonian captivity that took root on the rocky ridge of Judea and bloomed into that white Flower of humanity that is today the life and beauty of mankind and the hope of the world.

4. A Promise of Deliverance

A definite promise of deliverance from the present attack and siege of the enemy was now given. Not a step should the Assyrian king come into the city, not an arrow of his should light in it, no bank should be cast up against it. All those mighty hosts that he had marched across a thousand miles of hot sand and planted around it should be powerless to touch it, and by the way he came he should go back.

What was the assurance of this great promise in the face of that terrible swarm of enemies? "For I will defend this city, to save it." If God be for us, who can be against us? Nobody that we need count or fear. When God defends our city, we shall be safe. Stay in no city which God is not defending.

"For my own sake." God has interests of his own in every city where his people are, "and for my servant David's sake" there again is the blessing of pious ancestry.

Good men cast long, healing and protecting shadows down along their posterity.

God often remembers us because he cannot forget our fathers.

When God remembers Washington and Lincoln he is the more disposed to care for our nation. When he remembers Luther and Wesley and all the heroes of our faith who defended it in times of peril; when he remembers the martyrs who died that Jesus Christ might be worshipped and his name transmitted to the world as its Saviour, he will not let this name die among men, but will ever raise up new witnesses to it.

We ought so to live that our descendants will have over them the protecting shadow of our lives and that for our sakes God will bless them.

5. Swift Judgment

Judgment fell swift and terrible that very night. The Assyrians stationed their sentinels and covered their camp fires and lay down to sleep that night

with the same proud sense of security that they ever had. Any suggestion of surprise and disaster they would have laughed to scorn.

But one precaution they forgot to place: they neglected to station sentinels in the air and throw out a picket line against invisible spirits of destruction.

They supposed they were contending with man only and forgot God.

"Then the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses."

Jewish tradition says that pestilence swept over them like fire and left them dead. Herodotus the Greek historian also has a story that Sennacherib's army was destroyed by a pestilence owing to the prayers of a pious king of Egypt.

Whatever was the natural agency, it was the act and breath of God.

Twenty years later, in 681 B. C., Sennacherib himself was murdered by his sons.

So came to an end this attempt of the proud Assyrian to conquer Judah, though later he accomplished his purpose.

God moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform and his judgments to execute, and all the visible and invisible forces of nature are in his hand to do his will and distribute reward or retribution among the children of men. Clouds and darkness are round about him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. Give some account of Isaiah the prophet.
2. How can we give a place to prayer in our national life?
3. What grounds of assurance have we that prayer will be answered?
4. Give some notable historical instances of divine deliverance.
5. Give some notable historical instances of divine national judgment.

LESSON VIII.—MAY 25

JEREMIAH AND THE BABYLONIAN CRISIS

Jeremiah's Message to His People

Golden Text: Amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord your God. Jeremiah 26:13.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 86:1-8.

Lesson Material: Jer. 7:1-26; 9:1-9; 15: 1-10; 18:1-12; 25:1-14; 26:1-24; 36:1-32; 38:1-28.

Lesson Text: Jeremiah 26:8–16

8 ¶ Now it came to pass, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the LORD had commanded *him* to speak unto all the people, that the priests and the prophets and all the people took him, saying, Thou shalt surely die.

9 Why hast thou prophesied in the name of the LORD, saying, This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate without an inhabitant? And all the people were gathered against Jeremiah in the house of the LORD.

10 ¶ When the princes of Judah heard these things, then they came up from the king's house unto the house of the LORD, and sat down in the entry of the new gate of the LORD'S *house.*

11 Then spake the priests and the prophets unto the princes and to all the people, saying, This man *is* worthy to die; for he hath prophesied against this city, as ye have heard with your ears.

12 ¶ Then spake Jeremiah unto all the princes and to all the people, saying, The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that ye have heard.

13 Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your God; and the LORD will repent him of the evil that he hath pronounced against you.

14 As for me, behold, I *am* in your hand: do with me as seemeth good and meet unto you.

15 But know ye for certain, that if ye put me to death, ye shall surely bring innocent blood upon yourselves, and upon this city, and upon the inhabitants thereof: for of a truth the LORD hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears.

16 ¶ Then said the princes and all the people unto the priests and to the prophets; This man *is* not worthy to die; for he hath spoken to us in the name of the LORD our God.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. A People Enraged Against a Prophet.

2. The Prophet's Brave Defence.

3. The Princes Restrain the Mob.

4. The Elders Appeal to History.

Jeremiah, the son of a priest and himself a prophet, lived in degenerate times in Judah when all things were plunging into ruin. The call to prophesy came to him in the days of Josiah and his mission continued until after the fall of Jerusalem.

He shrank in humility from the call, but the word of Jehovah assured him of a divine message and divine protection to the end.

He was a man of family ties, of gloomy temperament and solitary habits, the weeping prophet of his time, as his Lamentations show.

And he lived in a terrible time. Babylon was thundering at the gates of Jerusalem and the dreadful doom of captivity was impending.

Jeremiah was shut up in the city during the siege, and he was in the hard situation of a prophet who had to seem unpatriotic.

He saw that there was no hope of overcoming or escaping from the foe, and that the best thing to do was to surrender to them. This looked like turning traitor to his own people and city and joining hands with their enemies. We can easily realize the feelings of the princes and people against him.

It takes the highest courage and the loftiest patriotism to tell the truth at such a time. Jeremiah was the one man in that beleaguered city who saw its true advantage and had the bravery to speak out.

The cry of treason is always raised by the demagogue against the truth-teller and reformer. It may take equal courage on our part to speak the truth in the pulpit, in politics, in business, or in social life.

1. A People Enraged Against a Prophet

The message that the prophet delivered on this occasion was one of threatened judgment that God "would make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth." This should have aroused the priests and people to a sense of their guilt and danger, but it only stirred them to furious hatred and violence. "The priests and the prophets and all the people took him, saying, Thou shalt surely die."

The holy city was their pride and the temple the very eye of their city. To speak against Jerusalem was treason of the rankest kind, and against the temple was sacrilege.

The truth and poignancy of the prophet's words were not considered; only their sharp thrust and sting were resented.

It takes no small amount of sense and grace to stand charges against one's country without animosity, and against one's religion without hot indignation; such charges touch the heart and fire the blood.

Yet the truth should always be heard and is the only thing that will do us permanent good.

Priest and people, however, rose against Jeremiah and threatened him with death. Instead of calmly hearing the message, they proposed to kill the messenger. Instead of putting out the fire, they would silence the fire bell by hanging the man who was ringing it.

This is the way the world has often dealt with its prophets. Socrates, Paul, Luther, Latimer, Lincoln—long is the roll of those who in one way or another have been made to suffer for truth and duty.

The disposition still lurks in us to strike back at those whose message rebukes us. A man seems so completely answered and silenced when his head is off.

Many a faithful pastor in the pulpit has suffered in this service, and we should all be careful to receive admonition in a spirit of meekness and not in anger.

2. The Prophet's Brave Defence

Word of the turbulant gathering and threatened violence reached the princes or rulers and judges, and they came up to the temple and sat in judgment on the case. The priests and people preferred their charges against Jeremiah, and he made a noble answer.

He first rolled the responsibility of his message upon the Lord. "The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words ye have heard."

When the preacher or reformer or truth-teller in any field has the Lord back of him he can stand up brave as a lion and face any angry congregation or city mob.

Then Jeremiah repeated and emphasized his message to the effect that the people should amend their ways and obey the voice of the Lord, who would then withhold the impending judgment. No threats of violence could induce him to abate or modify his message by a word or syllable: he stood by it and drove it home upon his hearers with a sharper point in the face of angry opposition.

A coward has no business in the shoes of a prophet or in a pulpit; let only brave men stand there.

Then with beautiful submission the prophet said: "I am in your hand: do with me as seemeth good and meet unto you." He was not taking anxious thought for his own life: that was in the hands of the people —and of God. He was concerned only to do his duty: other people might do as they willed.

A man who has this spirit can never be cowed or conquered. God is for him, who can be against him?

Nevertheless, the prophet warned his enraged opponents of the consequences of their threatened violence. If they took his life they would bring innocent blood upon themselves and their city, and their retribution would never sleep. And he closed his answer by a solemn asseveration that the Lord had sent him to speak unto them.

When God speaks through a prophet or teacher we should take care that we give earnest heed to his words. Amending our ways is the only way of escaping the judgment that will fall upon evil doers.

3. The Princes Restrain the Mob

The princes of the people were deeply impressed with the sincerity of Jeremiah and the truth of his message and declared: "This man is not worthy to die, for he hath spoken to us in the name of the Lord our God."

This illustrates the office and value of judges to weigh and restrain the impulses of the people and the violence of a mob.

Democracy is a great boon and force in the progress of the world, but it has its dangers and needs proper checks and safeguards. It is likely to be easily stirred by prejudice and passion and swept into unjust and cruel action.

Autocracy may impose a heavy yoke upon people, but mobocracy is the worst of all fates to fall upon men.

And therefore democracy needs to impose upon itself the guard and guidance of wise men who shall sit in review and judgment upon its ways and see that they conform to cool reason and impartial right.

The princes gave such a decision in this case, for no man is worthy of death for speaking truth, however sharp and severe it may be.

The nation that kills its prophets is cutting off its own head.

Spain thus decapitated its best brains in the Inquisition and thereby reduced itself to the impotency that has made it a third-rate power and pitiful spectacle in the modern world. The Bolsheviki in Russia have been pursuing the same foolish and fatal policy of murdering or expatriating its intellectuals and have thus thereby deprived Russia of their ability, putting out its eyes and bringing upon it the doom of a blind giant wildly groping about in the dark.

Rather than persecute its prophets a people should honor the men who speak brave words of rebuke and reformation.

Such men are the true friends and guides and progressive forces of a people, who deliver them from evil and uplift them. We do well to honor those who dare to rebuke us faithfully and urge us into the path of truth and obedience.

4. The Elders Appeal to History

Certain elders of the land now rose up and confirmed this decision of the princes. They seem to have remained silent before the threatening of the people, but now they caught the contagion of the courage of the princes and spoke out along the same lines.

They adduced an instance from their own history that taught the same lesson. A prophet in the days of king Hezekiah had uttered a dire prophecy against Zion, but did the king and people put him to death? No, they feared the Lord, and then the Lord repented him of the evil he had pronounced, or he adapted his judgment to the changed conduct of the people. "Thus might we procure great evil against our souls" (17-19), concluded these elders.

History is a great teacher of truth and morals, because it is the record of the experience of men of like passions with ourselves in like circumstances and temptations, and what happened to them will surely happen to us in like conditions.

We have a long history behind us in all things, law and government, science and literature and art, morals and religion, and this is why we are so far on in civilization and is a great reason why we should keep ourselves from folly and walk in the tried path of wisdom.

When we go wrong we "procure great evil against our own souls."

All our wrong doing to others strikes back into our own bosoms.

Every sin is a stab at our own hearts, but our souls are secure against every kind of evil when we keep pure within. If we let no evil thought or feeling find entrance and welcome in our hearts, the devil can find nothing in us to take hold of, no tinder his torch can touch into flame, no powder his spark can explode, and all his fiery darts will fall quenched and harmless at our feet.

Still another instance from their history was adduced by the elders, which occurred in the reign of Jehoiakim who caught a faithful prophet and slew him with a sword.

History is full of such warnings and impresses its grave lessons on us not once nor twice but many times as it shows us the laws of life working in every instance with inexorable certainty.

Many nations have gone to the graveyard of history and left their mournful monuments to warn us against the folly and fatality of trampling upon the words of our prophets.

It is encouraging to read that "the hand of Ahikam the son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah, that they should not give him into the hand of the people to put him to death."

So the angry, unreasonable mob was checked in its blind murderous passion, and the brave prophet was saved by the cool reasoning and wise warning of the princes and elders.

The mob spirit is one of the most dangerous and disgraceful aspects of our American life, putting us in a very bad light in com-

parison with other nations and bringing upon us the condemnation of the world. We should stand up against it and endeavor to instill into our people such respect for law and for fundamental human right as will check and stop it.

No life is safe as long as any life is at the mercy of a mob.

Every true servant of God is in his keeping, however his life may be threatened or even destroyed. Though truth may be on the scaffold and wrong be on the throne, yet "standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own." We should every one speak the truth and do our duty at any cost in the face of any danger, and then God will shelter us in his secret place.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. Give a sketch of the life of Jeremiah.
2. Give some instances of modern prophets who have enraged their own people.
3. Why is democracy a hard government to administer?
4. What checks are in our government to restrain hasty action?
5. What can we do to check the mob spirit in our country?
6. What became of Jeremiah?

LESSON IX.—JUNE 1

THE BABYLONIAN EXILE OF JUDAH

A Nation in Ruins

Golden Text: Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people. Proverbs 14:34.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 80:1-7.

Lesson Material: II Kings 21—25; II Chron. 36.

Lesson Text: II Chronicles 36:11-21

11 ¶ Zedekiah *was* one and twenty years old when he began to reign, and reigned eleven years in Jerusalem.
12 And he did *that which was* evil in the sight of the LORD his God, *and* humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet *speaking* from the mouth of the LORD.
13 And he also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God: but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the LORD God of Israel.
14 ¶ Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the LORD which he had hallowed in Jerusalem.
15 And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwellingplace:
16 But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till *there was* no remedy.
17 Therefore he brought upon them the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age: he gave *them* all into his hand.
18 And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king, and of his princes; all *these* he brought to Babylon.
19 And they burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof.
20 And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia:
21 To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: *for* as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. Zedekiah, Last of the Judean Kings.

2. Rebellion and Retribution.

3. The Besieged City.
4. The Breach in the Walls.
5. The Wretched End of the King.

We have come to the tragic end of the long story of the decline and end of the Judean kingdom.

The fall of a capital that carries down with it an empire is a world event. The fall of Rome shattered the world for a thousand years, and the fall of Constantinople in the fifteenth century again shook Europe and entered into its events for half a millennium.

Hardly yet have the echoes died away from the stupendous overthrow of empires and cities in the Great War that was the greatest world convulsion of history in which five historic empires and many cities came crashing down in one vast heap of ruin.

Constantinople and Jerusalem were also involved in this catastrophe, and these historic centers of Christianity again came under Christian control and Jerusalem fell directly into Christian hands.

The destruction of Jerusalem under its last king, Zedekiah, was one of the most awful and pitiful of national tragedies, not only in the agony and sum of suffering that attended it, but also in the eclipse of religious hopes.

Yet the city was burned that out of its ashes might arise a new and better Jerusalem which should receive the Messiah and prepare the way for the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of God on earth.

In this lesson we witness the last spark of its glory expire in darkness. Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah,—these are the short swift steps from the great and good Josiah down into a Babylonian jail.

1. Zedekiah, Last of the Judean Kings

Zedekiah is the vanishing point of this diminishing series.

He was the son of Josiah, the full brother of Jehoahaz, the half brother of Jehoiakim, and the uncle of Jehoiachin.

It is strange that a chain of such weak links was suspended from so strong an origin and support, but heredity often works in the dark and produces some unexpected and unexplainable results.

Perhaps the mother was the source of weakness in this line of degeneration, and yet it is rarely safe to blame the mother.

The times were against these men; they were floating on a flood of corruption that was heading towards its Niagara—what could they do? Zedekiah is to be pitied for his weakness and for his unhappy time and circumstances more than he is to be blamed for his wickedness.

Nevertheless the fatal record stands written against him: "He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord his God": the same monotonous record that has occurred in this history with wearisome repetition.

The power of evil to project itself down upon sons and successors is one of the fatal threads in the complicated web of the world; but then the good has the same power in a still higher degree, so that the account is not one-sided and is more than balanced.

It was no excuse, however, for Zedekiah to quote his predecessors or his mother in justification of his course, for he himself "did evil in the sight of the Lord."

Heredity gives a man a tendency or push in the direction of good or evil, but he need not and does not go either way until he chooses his own path.

No one ever sins until he consents, and in the consent lies the sin.

2. Rebellion and Retribution

It also stands written against Zedekiah that he rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar.

This marks the blindness and folly of his course.

The king of Babylon had carried off Jehoiachin and put Zedekiah in his place, and yet the puppet king presently presumed to rebel against his august and mighty master and thereby sealed his own doom.

We do not need to go so far back to find such exhibitions of the blindness and insanity of sin. Sin still breeds conceit and vanity and rashness and leads a man to make a fool of himself.

Imagining himself strong and clever, the evil doer plunges into some reckless course of conduct and hopelessly enmeshes himself in the net of his own folly.

And the king was not alone in his evil doing, for the people and the very chief of the priests, the ministers of religion and the doctors of divinity and professors of theology, also transgressed and even joined in all the abominations of the heathen.

They also did this in the face of messengers sent to them by the Lord God of their fathers, warning them against their course, for Jehovah always had compassion on his people and tried to reclaim them from their evil ways.

But they only mocked these messengers or prophets, and so after rebellion the next word we look for is wrath, and, sure enough, here it is: "The wrath of the Lord arose against the people, till there was no remedy.

Divine wrath follows human rebellion as an explosion follows ignited powder, as lightning follows the electric overloading of a cloud.

The Lord is not an impassive spectator of human evil, but he sits in judgment over it and expresses his judgment in condemnation and fiery bolts.

The Lord restrained his wrath and let things go to such a length in Jerusalem that "there was no remedy," and the only thing left to do was to cast Judah along with Israel into the pit of Babylonian captivity. That is a seemingly peculiar and hard way for divine judgment to work, but captivity is the end of all sin.

The worst thing a bad man can ask for himself is to be let alone: no lightning bolt of judgment then need fall from heaven: he will do the work of judgment and wreak vengeance on himself.

Sin is separation, and to be cast from the presence of the Lord is the final end and deepest judgment of sin.

3. The Besieged City

Zedekiah's rebellion started the march of the terrible Babylonian hosts westward across the hot plains, and in the tenth month of the ninth year of his reign they arrived at Jerusalem and shut it up in a state of siege (II Kings 25: 1–12).

Then began a scene of horror such as is rarely if ever witnessed in our modern warfare.

A cordon of camps was pitched around the city and every avenue of escape was tightly closed. Forts were built around it, probably movable towers provided with battering rams that could be pushed close to the walls so as to scale them or beat them down.

Inside the beleaguered city was a state of famine and starvation and death that passes the power of the pen to describe or of the heart to pity.

The people became shadows and skinny skeletons that fought like wild beasts for crumbs of bread. The wealthiest citizens and delicately-reared and richly-dressed ladies searched dunghills for scraps of food. Riots made the streets slippery with blood. Mothers killed and ate their own children. The last human instinct perished, and only beasts were left.

This awful siege drew from Jeremiah the heart-breaking sigh and sobs of his "Lamentations," the "In Memoriam" of the Bible, the most woeful funeral dirge in the literature of the world.

"How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people!" "Their visage is blacker than coal; they are not known in the streets; their skin cleaveth to their bones; it is withered, it is become like a stick. They that be slain with the sword are better than they that be slain with hunger. The hands of the pitiful women have sodden their own children."

Jeremiah passed through this siege and writes as an eye-witness and personal sufferer.

Sin does some terrible work. It can take a great city and turn it into a fermenting, festering, fighting mass of corruption and violence and death, a plague-spot of horrors, a fiery splotch of hell; and what it can do in a multitudinous city, it can also do with a single soul.

4. The Breach in the Walls

Day after day and month after month for a year and a half the Babylonians held the wretched, starving, dying city in their grasp, ever tightening their grip and squeezing the life out of its gasping body. Their battering rams kept up their pounding against the walls and gates and every day the awful doom drew nearer.

At last a breach was made through a gate or wall, and the enemy poured into the holy and beautiful city.

Slaughter rushed through the streets and "upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped with age" the sword fell with undiscriminating fury.

The city was set on fire and presently was a mass of flames. Temple and palace and humble home were enwrapped in one common conflagration and were soon ashes. The walls were broken down, and only a great smoking ash-heap was left to crown the holy hill of Zion, while all the treasures of brass and gold were carried off to Babylon.

This was the end of that city that sat there on that height of privilege and power so defiant and scornful in its idolatry and guilt.

Judgment sometimes seems a long time in coming, but at last it does arrive and sets things right. Many are the nations and cities that have traveled the same road and come to the same end.

Any nation that lifts itself up in pride and threatens and scorns other nations and tramples upon the laws of civilization is heading towards a terrible downfall, as the latest page of history proclaims in trumpet tones. It is written across all the past, with its graveyard full of mournful monuments, that the nation that forgets God shall perish.

The same judgment is written against our personal sins, and it is equally certain that the soul that sinneth shall die. Fools mock at sin, but a day is coming when it will register its retribution in flames of fire and will leave only ashes to tell the story of their guilt and folly.

5. The Wretched End of Zedekiah

As the Babylonians poured into the city, probably through the northern gate, the Jews escaped, probably through the southern gate, and made for the Jordan valley, rushing pell-mell down the steep defiles into the plain below.

The Babylonians, however, were not in the habit of letting their enemies escape. They had come there to stamp out that Judean plague-spot, verily Jehovah himself had "brought" them there on that mission, and they should not fail.

Zedekiah was quickly captured down by Jericho, and he and his sons and his princes were taken up to Riblah, north of Damascus, where Nebuchadnezzar had his headquarters, while his generals were simultaneously besieging Jerusalem and Tyre.

There was no mercy in those days for such treacherous vassals. Cruelties were cunningly devised and refined to prolong the agony. Zedekiah's sons were first taken and slain before his eyes. He was then forced to kneel before his master and his own eyes were jabbed out. Finally he was taken bound in chains to Babylon where he lingered in prison until death brought release.

We may be thankful that we live in a more humane age. And yet sin is no kinder now than it was then, and we deceive ourselves if we think it is. It still jabs out eyes, the very eyes of the soul, and binds the soul with chains, and its wages still is death.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. Why do royal dynasties tend towards degeneracy?
2. Is God unjust and unkind in visiting retribution upon sin?
3. What kind of a world would it be if sin were not punished?
4. Give some instances of the siege of other great cities?
5. In what ways does sin blind the eyes and bind the soul in chains?

LESSON X.—JUNE 8

EZEKIEL ENCOURAGES THE EXILES

Ezekiel's Mission to the Exiles

Golden Text: I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away. Ezekiel 34:16.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 23.

Lesson Material: Psalm 137:1–6; Ezekiel 34.

Lesson Text: Ezekiel 34:11–16, 25–26

11 ¶ For thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I, *even* I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out.
12 As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep *that are* scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day.
13 And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country.
14 I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and *in* a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel.
15 I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord GOD.
16 I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up *that which was* broken, and will strengthen that which was sick: but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment.

25 And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods.
26 And I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. Unfaithful Shepherds.
2. The Good Shepherd.
3. A Regathered Flock.
4. Seeking the Lost.
5. Showers of Blessing.

Ezekiel is one of the great prophets of Judah. The details of his biography are meager. He was born in Jerusalem in the reign of Josiah, where he was a younger contemporary of Jeremiah and may have heard him preach, and was carried into captivity in Babylon with the first captives along with king Jehoiachin.

He was married and lived in his own house with a colony of Jews near Babylon, who enjoyed considerable freedom, probably only paying tribute or taxes to the Babylonian king.

Ezekiel was highly imaginative in thought and style, clothing his visions in the garb of elaborate pictures and symbols.

The early prophecies of his book relate to Jerusalem, where the people were in a terrible state of demoralization and the final destruction of the ill-fated city was impending. In these prophecies he foresaw the doom of the city and viewed it as the just judgment of God, as did Jeremiah.

But with our lesson a change comes over the judgments of the prophet, and he begins to speak of restoration to the exiles and the returning glory of the Lord upon them in their own land.

1. Unfaithful Shepherds

In the opening verses of the chapter the prophet delivers the judgment of the Lord against the unfaithful shepherds or kings whose unrighteous and wicked reigns had brought ruin upon the people. "Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks?"

The indictment against them is drawn out in a long list of details of the ways in which the kings had robbed and maltreated their subjects.

They had eaten the fat of the flocks and clothed themselves with their wool, but had not healed the sick among the people nor bound up the broken, and they had ruled over them with "cruelty and force."

It is a vivid picture of the unjust and oppressive government of bad rulers.

Kings and priests have acquired an unfavorable and often a bad reputation in all ages. Called to keep order and minister to the welfare of their people, they have often turned their privilege and power to their own profit and robbed their subjects.

Especially have they been guilty of taking the best of the flock for their own selfish gratification, living off the fat of the land while failing to fulfil their duty as guardians and shepherds.

Bad government has been the cause of decline and ruin in many of the empires and republics of history.

Extravagance and corruption, bribery and graft, unjust and oppressive taxation, these are an old story not only in ancient but equally so in modern times.

Our American cities furnish many pages of such history.

The priest must often be classed along with the king or the governor or the mayor in this misuse of his office.

Too often has he fed upon the fat of the lambs and lived in comfort and luxury at the expense of his people, or has gratified his ease and pride rather than served in the spirit of sacrifice.

All such unfaithfulness in these high offices contribute to public and social and spiritual decline and may work the ruin of the state and the church.

2. The Good Shepherd

Ezekiel introduces a new note into his prophecies in his picture of the Good Shepherd. "For thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day."

This is an echo of the precious Twenty-third Psalm and a foregleam of the still more precious Good Shepherd of John's Gospel.

A shepherd is a deeply suggestive figure of God as the Keeper and Saviour of men.

The fine sympathy binding the shepherd and the flock together, the strength of the shepherd and the pathetic dependence of the sheep, the intimate knowledge of the shepherd with each sheep and lamb of his flock, the beautiful trust of the sheep, the constant care and wisdom with which the shepherd guides, protects and feeds the flock, the tenderness with which he gives special attention and healing ministry to the weak and wounded and gathers the bleating lambs into his arms,—all this which is so beautifully exemplified in the Eastern shepherd is only a faint reflection of the shepherd heart in God.

It is one of the greatest securities and comforts of our human life that we can put our trust in God as our Shepherd. "Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves: we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture."

In verse 23 of our chapter the shepherd becomes the Messiah and is no other than Christ: "And I will set up one Shepherd over them, and he will feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd."

The prophet is looking beyond the literal David, who had then long since gone, to his spiritual Son who was to come. Jesus as he walked the ways of Palestine calling himself the Good Shepherd was the true fulfilment of this prophecy, and still he walks amidst us as the Shepherd of our souls.

3. A Regathered Flock

God as the good Shepherd would regather the people of Israel scattered in their exile and "bring them to their own land."

The hope of return was now burning in the breasts of the exiles in Babylon as their passionate hope and was shining in their night as the star that was to lead them back.

Exile or even a temporary residence or visit in a foreign land begets a deep and strange homesickness that is one of the most powerful and pathetic emotions of the soul.

The Jews were passionate lovers of their own land and in their exile were consumed with despair and were ever cherishing every faintest hope of re-

turn. God had implanted this deep desire in their hearts and he would not let it burn itself out into ashes, but would cause it to issue in glad fulfilment.

Even so has he implanted in our hearts a sense of our foreignness in this world of sin and a sense of need and hope that we may return to him.

> We also are strangers and foreigners in this land of earth and never shall our souls find satisfaction and peace until we return to God who is our home. "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place, or home land, in all generations."

A most pleasant picture is spread out before the weary exiles of the goodly land they would find on their return. God would "feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be."

> What welcome words would these be to these exiles languishing on the hot, flat plains of Babylonia!

Few words are more pleasantly suggestive to us than "mountains" and "rivers" and "pasture," calling up pictures of variety and plenty and beauty. Such words bring us close to nature and to the God of nature with all the infinite variety and plentitude and richness of his life.

> This prophecy was fulfilled in some degree when the exiled Israelites were restored to their own land, but such fulfilment was only in a partial and even a disappointing degree, and its real fulfilment is found in the spiritual kingdom of God and land of pleasantness which we enter through faith in and fellowship with the Good Shepherd, our Lord Jesus Christ.

4. Seeking the Lost

The further ministry of the Good Shepherd is exhibited in his care in seeking the lost and binding up their wounds. "I will seek again that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick." The Israelites were lost in a peculiarly painful sense and were also more or less scattered among the heathen and were broken in body under their bondage and sick at heart in their souls.

This condition was to be remedied by the Good Shepherd who would regather them out of their lost and scattered state and would restore them to physical and spiritual health.

Fulfilled as this was in some partial degree in their own land, this prophecy comes to its fuller realization in the kingdom of heaven as established by Christ.

He comes as the Good Shepherd of humanity to seek and save that which is lost. Our poor human kind are most truly and aptly described as lost sheep wandering and scattered in many far lands of sin and sorrow.

Men who deny this are quickly found to be thinking in terms of the same facts under other names, and there is no escaping this universal and tragic condition.

Christ alone is a Shepherd who can find us and bring us back to the fold of our heavenly Father. He is now in the world on this mission and everywhere is seeking men and endeavoring to win them back home.

He also is the great Physician to bind up the broken hearted and to heal and strengthen the sick, and out over all our world floats the music of his immortal words, " Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

5. Showers of Blessing

The prophet returns to his picture of the pleasant land the exiles shall find on their return. Ezekiel has sometimes been thought to be a rather dry and statistical prophet, but he is a true poet and has the power of suggesting most delightful prospects.

His prophecies are often pictures of exceeding beauty and charm.

What can be more significant of safety and rest and delight than his prophecy that the returned people "shall dwell in safety in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods"? The "wilderness" is suggestive of danger from wild beasts, but it shall be cleared of such ravenous enemies when God leads his people into it.

Still more vivid in the picture is the poetic touch that they "shall sleep in the woods." The woods also are often inhabited by enemies that prowl by day and by night and are seeking their prey, "red in tooth and claw with ravin." But the restored people of God shall sleep in them, fearless and unconscious of anxiety because they are kept in the keeping of God.

Is not this fulfilled in the God of the spiritual Israel today, who "never slumbers nor sleeps"?

All these good things are summed up in the beautiful phrase and promise, "There shall be showers of blessing." "Blessing" is a richly suggestive word, but "showers" multiplies it into plenty thick as the raindrops that fall in sheets and masses out of the pregnant clouds.

God is not parsimonious and niggardly in his spiritual blessings, but drops them upon us in showers. "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. Give an account of the final fall of Jerusalem and of the part played in it by Jeremiah and Ezekiel.
2. What are the real roots of bad government and how can they be cured?
3. In what sense and degree were these promises of the restoration of the Jews to their promised land fulfilled?
4. Why are the Jews still "scattered" among the nations today?
5. Enumerate in some measure "the showers of blessing" we enjoy.

III. THE RESTORATION OF JUDAH

LESSON XI.—JUNE 15

THE RETURN AND THE REBUILDING OF THE TEMPLE

Significance of the Return

Golden Text: Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Isaiah 40:1.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 126.

Lesson Material: Ezra 1, 3—6.

Lesson Text: Ezra 3:8–13; 6:14–15

8 ¶ Now in the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the remnant of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem; and appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the LORD.

9 Then stood Jeshua *with* his sons and his brethren, Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together, to set forward the workmen in the house of God: the sons of Henadad, *with* their sons and their brethren the Levites.

10 And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel.

11 And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because *he is* good, for his mercy *endureth* for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.

12 But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, *who were* ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy:

13 So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.

14 And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished *it*, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.

15 And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. The House of the Lord.

2. Song and Joy in Building.

3. Mingled with Sadness.
4. Adversaries.
5. The Work Finished.
6. The Day of Dedication.

Exile has done its work, the Jews have been purified of idolatry in the fires of Babylonian captivity, and the way has been opened for their return. The forty-two thousand home-coming pioneers found Jerusalem a heap of ruins that had been left by Nebuchadnezzar fifty years before. They obtained temporary homes in neighboring towns and then began the work of rebuilding the city.

1. The House of the Lord

The first building they began was "the house of the Lord."

The first part of the building erected was the altar, and the daily offering of sacrifices according to the law of Moses was immediately reëstablished. Then the foundation of the main structure was laid.

Thus all the while the temple was rising the smoke of the sacrifice ascended and worship was combined with work. It might have been argued that these returned exiles should have rebuilt their homes before they erected the altar and began the temple. They did secure temporary homes, but they were right in beginning with the altar.

That was the vital center of their city whence all its inspiration and activities were to radiate.

It was their worship that inspired their work, the center that swept the circle and fixed every point on its circumference, and therefore they did well to establish it first.

The altar is the first structure that should be erected everywhere.

God should have the first place in our plans, and worship should always precede work.

Our forefathers, in founding our country, among their first buildings in each settlement erected a church and started public worship. We have

built all our civilization up around this altar, and it is the foundation and center of our national greatness today.

In founding a home, let the altar of prayer be put first at its center. The home can be built up in purity and peace and power only as it is pervaded by worship.

Every life should be built on this foundation, and all our plans should be inspired and guided by prayer. Let us seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all needful things shall be added unto us.

2. Song and Joy in Building

The laying of the foundation of the temple was accompanied with song and great joy. The priests were arrayed in their gorgeous robes, and the instruments of music were brought forth. David had organized a great temple choir and the musical service was now restored.

The priests and Levites sang together by course, or responsively, the solo singers singing a strain which was then answered with a great burst of song from the chorus accompanied with the cymbals and all the instruments of music.

All the people also shouted with a great shout, and thus they all praised the Lord, "because he is good, for his mercy endureth forever toward Israel."

Though they were returned exiles in the midst of the ruins of their former city, yet they saw the goodness of the Lord in their situation, and their hearts swelled into song.

The Hebrews were a singing people through all their varied history, and this was one fountain of their faith and hope ever gushing up through their most adverse circumstances and deepest tragedies and bitterest tears.

Worship has always wafted its way upward on the wings of song.

It instinctively weds itself to music and pours itself forth in strains of joy and hope.

If any people ought to sing it is they who believe in God and live under a sense of his fellowship and care and love.

The church services should be inspired and jubilant with song accompanied with the swelling strains of the organ and other fitting instruments.

"Let the people praise thee, O God, let all the people praise thee."

4. Mingled with Sadness.

The joy and song of the occasion, however, were mingled with sadness. Many of the old men, priests and Levites and heads of houses, who had seen the glory of the former temple that had been reared and enriched by the hand of Solomon, when they saw these rough foundations laid in the midst of the ruins of the city, wept and sobbed like children.

They saw the golden age in the past and thought the former days were better than their own degenerate times.

Old men are apt to look backward and have sad thoughts over the passing of former things. The new ways look strange to them and they fear they are not as good as the old.

But "many shouted aloud with joy." Doubtless these were the younger men who faced forward rather than backward and saw the dawn of coming glories rather than the fading of past splendors.

Youth is fresh in faith and hope and sees in present attainments a foundation on which shall rise the fair structure of the future.

The same foundation called forth such mingled shouting and sobbing that it was difficult to distinguish the one from the other. The same state of society or condition of the church may be viewed by some as indicating degeneracy and coming ruin, and by others as forcasting progress and coming triumph.

Everything depends on the point of view, the backward or the forward look.

The pessimist laments that the rose grows out of mud, but the optimist rejoices that the mud grows into a rose: the same fact looked at from opposite ends yields these opposite views.

The old men had some reason for their sadness, but the young men had more reason for their hope. The old temple was one of material glory and every such temple must crumble back into dust; but the new temple was a step forward towards that temple which was to receive the promised Messiah, who would build a spiritual Temple that would fill the whole earth with its glory.

These young enthusiasts were right, and we should strive to keep their spirit alive in our hearts.

God did not live in the past only, but is alive today and forevermore; and whatever the achievements and glories of the past, he ever has some better thing in store for us.

4. Adversaries

A serious obstacle now arose in the way of building the walls of the city. The adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity were rebuilding the temple (ch. 4).

These adversaries were of the mixed race of the Samaritans, composed of the remnants and dregs of the Israelites left behind in the land at the captivity and were amalgamated and debased with Assyrian colonists that were forcibly settled among them.

Their religion was a corresponding mixture of the worship of Jehovah and idolatry II Kings 17:33). These corrupt worshipers came up to Jerusalem and with smooth speech made a plausible proposal. "Let us build with you," they said: "for we seek your God, as ye do."

Zerubbabel and his chiefs rejected the proposal on the ground that, as he said to them, "Ye have nothing to do with us to build a house unto our God."

These Samaritans were still in the mire of idolatry, from which horrible pit the Jews had just been rescued.

The purified patriots knew that their national and spiritual life depended upon their keeping themselves unspotted from that filth.

Therefore they would not associate with idolaters even in building the temple. They had just come out from that company and would remain separate and touch not the unclean thing.

The speech of these adversaries was smooth and courteous, but so was the speech of the great Adversary that tempted Jesus.

We must look behind the speech to the speaker, and often what the speaker is spoils what he says.

When impure or evil persons come to us saying, "Let us build with you," we should beware of their advances and refuse to join in work with them. These adversaries did not let up in their opposition when their proposal was rejected, but they showed their true attitude towards the new building by weakening the hands of the people and troubling the builders.

It takes no grace of mind or cunning head or hand to weaken a good work; we can easily annoy and vex and obstruct others if we will.

5. The Work Finished

The work was resumed and the elders were greatly encouraged by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. These men were helpers rather than hinderers, they encouraged and inspired the workers by their prophesying or preaching, declaring unto them the will of God.

The man of ideas is needed in building as well as the man with hands; mind is as necessary as muscle, brain not less than brawn.

Ideas draw up plans and specifications and give direction and energy and enthusiasm to the work. The prophet inspires men by his personality and is not less but more important in building than stone masons and carpenters.

But all men with their gifts differing are necessary to the planning and pushing of a work, and each one should receive due recognition and reward.

"And they builded and finished it": they did not lose heart and quit with the walls half way up, leaving a roofless and useless structure. Having put their hands to this plow they drove it to the end of the furrow and to the finishing of the field.

They had grit as well as grace and in the face of opposition and many discouragements they carried the work on until the last stone was laid and their temple stood complete.

The grace and grit of perseverance are much needed in all our work, and it is a solemn teaching that no man, having put his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

6. The Day of Dedication

It was a great day in Israel when the priests and people "kept the dedication of the house of God with joy." No doubt there was a great service with a throng of worshipers with a gorgeous ritual of offerings and incense and vested priests and instruments of music and antiphonal choirs.

There were no old men sobbing that day, unless they were weeping tears of joy, and it was with triumphant gladness that they all entered into the great service.

To dedicate anything is to set it apart and devote it to a special cause or use, and in this sense we dedicate our churches to the worship of God.

Having built and finished them we give them over to his service and thereafter they are restricted to this use.

Yet the worship of God always expresses itself in the welfare of men, and the church is not to be shut against any good work but is to be a community center and fountain of every kind of good to the people.

Holiness and health and happiness are to flow from it in streams of teaching and activity. It is to be a place where we can gather and sing our most joyous songs and blow our most jubilant trumpets.

Dedication is to extend to all things, and we are to present our very bodies a living sacrifice unto God, which is our reasonable service.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. Give some account of the steps by which the Jews were returned from Babylon to Jerusalem.
2. What sort of churches should we build?
3. How can we do all our work in a spirit of joy?
4. What is pessimism and what is optimism?
5. What adversaries do we have in our work?
6. What parts do divine grace and human grit play in our lives?
7. How shall we dedicate all things to God?

LESSON XII.—JUNE 22

REFORMS UNDER EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

The Bible in the Life of the Nation

Golden Text: Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts. Malachi 3:7.

Devotional Reading: Hosea 14:1-8.

Lesson Material: Ezra 7—10; Nehemiah 5, 8, 13.

Lesson Text: Nehemiah 8:1-3, 8-12

And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that *was* before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel.

2 And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month.

3 And he read therein before the street that *was* before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people *were attentive* unto the book of the law.

8 So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused *them* to understand the reading.

9 ¶ And Nehemiah, which *is* the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day *is* holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law.

10 Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for *this* day *is* holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength.

11 So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day *is* holy; neither be ye grieved.

12 And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. A Demand for the Bible.

2. A Great Bible Reading.

3. The First Pulpit.

4. Reading Distinctly.

5. Results.

While the wall was going up around Jerusalem there was a great cry raised by the poor against the rich because of profiteering and oppression, showing us the ancient forms of modern abuses.

The wealthier Jews were lending money to their poor brethren, charging them usurious rates of interest, and foreclosing mortgages on their land.

Nehemiah, who had succeeded Ezra, redressed this social evil by remitting the interest and restoring the lands.

Sanballat and Tobiah also kept up their machinations. They tried to inveigle Nehemiah into a conference in a distant village, but Nehemiah saw through their cunning trap and refused to walk into it.

At length the wall was finished in fifty-two days, rapid work for builders with their tools, and then followed the event of this lesson.

1. A Demand for the Bible

The important thing about a city is not the wall around it, but the kind of people within it. If a wall is only to shut in a nest of robbers or a pool of corruption, it were better not built.

The wall around Jerusalem derived its value from the people safeguarded behind it. They were worth more to the world in that day than any other people on earth.

The wall having been completed, all the people gathered themselves together as one man in the street and called upon Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel.

A unanimous demand from the people for the reading of the Word of God —what a splendid sign was this of moral health and coming blessing?

These people were not so absorbed in material building that they had no thought for spiritual interests, they did not build that wall up between themselves and their worship.

Men in these days are often so passionately devoted to the pursuit of material gain that they neglect and despise their higher welfare, they build up walls of wealth that shut out the blue sky and the face of God.

But when people are hungering for the Word of God all their spiritual faculties are alive, and they receive life more abundant and blessed.

Ezra the scribe was ready with the law. This is the first mention of Ezra in this book, and it is supposed that he had been absent for a number of years engaged in compiling and editing the law of Moses.

When the demand for him came he was ready; and every scribe and teacher of God's Word should be ready through such study and preparation as will enable him to meet his opportunities and fulfil the demands that are made upon him.

Ezra brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding. That was an ideal congregation.

2. A Great Bible Reading

Ezra read the law before that great assembly of forty-two thousand (7:66) that filled the public square before the water gate on the east side of the city from morning till noon. Priests stood at his side and doubtless took turns at helping him.

It was a great community meeting for the study of the Bible.

These people were not afraid of being wearied with worship and did not demand that the sermon be cut down to twenty-five minutes and that the whole service be not more than an hour long, but they went through and enjoyed a service that lasted from daylight to midday.

We have become so delicate and dilettante that we cannot endure the least wearisomeness and snap our watches to warn the minister not to run over the hour.

People that are so interested in worship that they forget the clock and lose all sense of time get some bread out of the service that will develop robust spiritual life and last many days.

The interest in this service was shown by the fact that "the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law."

Attention is one secret of good hearing, and good hearing contributes inspiringly to good teaching and preaching; and no doubt one reason why there is so much poor preaching up in the pulpit is that there is such lamentably poor attention down in the pews.

The word attention means a stretching of the mind towards the subject being presented. Attention, then, is not a lazy, languid state of mind, mere emptiness into which something is being poured and is passively received, but it is an active and earnest effort to seize and assimilate the truth.

The truths of God's Word are so great and grand and vital and blessed that we should never sit passive under them and let them slip idly off our minds, but we should stretch all our faculties to grasp them and feed upon them.

3. The First Pulpit

The method by which the law was read is worth noting. "Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood."

This is the first mention of the pulpit in history, and it marks the beginning of a new method of worship.

This was the first time of which we have record when the Word of God was preached from a pulpit. Hitherto the religion of Israel had been largely proclaimed through the priest using sacrifice and symbol, and through the prophet delivering messages. The temple had grown up as a vast ritualistic system that invested worship in the gorgeous garb of splendid ceremony.

This simple wooden pulpit dispensed with all ceremony and addressed the people directly, reading to them the Word of God and explaining it in everyday speech.

The day Ezra set up that pulpit ritualistic worship appealing to the senses began to wane, and spiritual worship addressed directly to the reason

and conscience began to increase. Henceforth the priest was to be less and less in religion, and the preacher more and more.

That unadorned wooden pulpit looked pitifully plain and impotent as it stood under the shadow of the magnificent rising temple, but it was destined to displace the temple and fill the whole earth.

Ezra, narrow scribe as he was, was the first preacher and was the forerunner of Paul and Augustine and Luther, and his pulpit has become the throne of the Christian world.

The preacher did not monopolize the whole service, but the people had a part, for when Ezra blessed the Lord the congregation answered "Amen, Amen," a good Methodist response that used to be frequently heard from the people, but we have grown so formal and "cultured" that it is now silenced in nearly all of our churches.

The pulpit should not do all the worshiping, but should leave something for the pew, and responsive reading gives the congregation a larger share in the service.

4. Reading Distinctly

The manner in which the law was read is instructive. "They read in the book of the law of God distinctly." No hurrying through the passage and slurring the syllables and mumbling and muttering words and droning and chanting singsong monotones in an unintelligible voice; but the voice was natural and audible and strong, each sound was distinctly enunciated, each syllable was clean-cut and sharp, every word fell from the lips of the reader as a newly-minted coin, or issued clear as the stroke of a bell, or rang out vibrant as the blare of a trumpet, and every listener throughout that vast audience could hear with distinctness and ease.

In this respect the first pulpit was a good example for all pulpits.

The way in which the Bible is read in some pulpits would be ludicrous were it not so painful to a practical mind and a reverent soul. What is the use of hurrying through and mumbling over and whining out a passage of Scripture, if it is not to be heard and understood?

Better close the book than butcher it in cold blood.

Reading in a natural tone and distinct voice is a fine art and beautiful accomplishment, and nowhere is it more useful and beautiful than in the pulpit and in all reading of the Word of God.

Not only did they read the law distinctly, but they also "gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading."

The law of Moses was written in a language that had become somewhat antiquated and obsolete to these Babylonian and Persian Jews, and so it needed to be explained.

This is still the business of the scholar and preacher and teacher. We are to translate these ancient laws into modern speech so that they will be living realities that will come home to every one's business and bosom.

The religion of the Bible is too often introduced to us as though it were a stranger and foreigner in the world, speaking a language that we do not understand. We must dress it up in the garb of today and make it speak in our own tongue.

These words have the wonderful power of pouring their ideas into our minds and of reproducing the whole stage and scenery and life of that ancient time before our eyes. They are bridges uniting our minds with these inspired minds over which roll the commerce of their thoughts into our hearts.

These words are bits of spiritual bread from other days that we can masticate and digest and assimilate so that they will pass into our blood and reappear in the strength and beauty of our lives.

Nothing is so useful and vital and invigorating as the law of the Lord when we are given its sense and read it with understanding.

5. Results

What was the result of this reading and preaching from Ezra's pulpit? "All the people wept, when they heard the words of the law."

This law convinced them of sin and righteousness and judgment to come, and they were seized with penitence that could only express itself in tears.

This is the test of all reading of the Scriptures. The reading may be ever so distinct and beautiful, it may charm every hearer with its mellifluous music, but if it brings conviction to no conscience, penitence to no heart, tears to no eyes, help to no soul, it is in vain.

Reading and teaching and preaching the Bible is serious business that should prove its usefulness and efficiency by convicted and converted souls.

Nehemiah and Ezra, however, turned the people from their tears to joy and feasting. It was right that they should weep, but it was a feast time and the law of Moses had some better news for them than mere conviction and judgment.

The Word of God begins with the law, but it goes on to grace and mercy, forgiveness and purity and peace, and it ends with joy that should dry all our tears and turn life into gladness and song.

There is something wrong with our Bible reading and preaching and Christian worship and faith and life if they only make us sad and despondent and do not dispel the night and break into the light of morning.

To be saved is not to be sad, but it is to have a happy heart and a smiling face in the joy of the Lord.

Such were the results of this great community study of the Bible, and the book is still the power of God unto salvation.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. Give some account of Nehemiah and how he got to Jerusalem.
2. Give a brief descriptive account of what the Bible is.
3. How do words convey thought to us?
4. Why are the words of the Bible so vital and vitalizing?
5. How can we learn to read distinctly?
6. What effect has the Bible had on the world?

LESSON XIII.—JUNE 29

REVIEW: REHOBOAM TO NEHEMIAH

From Rehoboam to Nehemiah

Golden Text: Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people. Proverbs 14:34.

Devotional Reading: Micah 4:1-5.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. *Division and Degeneracy.*
2. *The Prophets of the Northern Kingdom.*
3. *The Decline of the Southern Kingdom.*
4. *Fall and Captivity.*
5. *Return and Restoration.*

The lessons of the Quarter extend from the division of the Hebrew monarchy that came to the zenith of its power and glory under Solomon to the fall and captivity of the Jews in Babylon, and it is a record of religious decline and degeneracy developing the coarsest and most sensual idolatrous corruption and ending in the death which is ever the wages of sin.

1. Division and Degeneracy

The disruption of the Hebrew monarchy was due to the growing burden and evil of the national establishment at Jerusalem, which imposed ever increasing taxation on the people and excited dissatisfaction and threatened rebellion.

> Matters came to a crisis on the succession of Rehoboam to Solomon, when the situation was put up to him and he had an opportunity to adjust grievances and harmonize differences.

But he was so foolish as to reject the counsel of his elder advisers and listen to the folly of his rash young companions, and so he made such impossible threats and demands that the accumulating unrest exploded in rebellion, and the kingdom was blown asunder.

On that narrow strip of seacoast, not greater in area then many an American county, for more than two hundred years stood two small kingdoms in rivalry and sometimes in bloody conflict.

It is a sad illustration of the evils of division in state and church.

Such divisions are sometimes necessary and justifiable on one side or the other, but they are always due to human wrong and are attended with grave evils.

The two kingdoms were soon infected with the same poisonous seeds of religious degeneracy coming in from idolatrous neighbors and ran their swift course to their fatal end.

The northern kingdom was more quickly and deeply impregnated with idolatrous contagion and ran a more rapid course of degeneracy, but both became involved in the same disease and came to the same death.

The history of these two small kingdoms, divinely chosen and taught as they were, illustrates what has taken place often on a colossal scale on the stage of the world as its great kingdoms and empires and republics have risen into greatness and grandeur and then gone crashing to their ruin, and they write the epitaph that has been engraved on the tombstones of so many nations, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God."

2. The Prophets of the Northern Kingdom

These prophets that appear in our lessons are Elijah and Elisha, and Amos and Hosea.

Elijah was a fiery thunderbolt of God appearing suddenly as out of a storm-cloud of heaven, smiting the apostate land with famine, and then challenging the idolatrous and unclean priests of Baal to a trial on the mighty altar of Carmel.

Jezebel had dragged Israel down to the lowest depths of idolatry, and a bold blow had to be given to shatter the false and restore the true religion.

The false priests first gave an exhibition of their power to bring fire from heaven, and their utter failure illustrates the impotence of all false religion to destroy the roots of sin and bring the world to righteousness.

Elijah then gave his exhibition of divine power and the effect was decisive. The people were turned back to Jehovah and the false prophets were slain.

Yet Elijah's revival was only temporary and he himself fled in cowardly collapse, and again we are taught that not outward displays of power but only an inward change of heart will do the true work of religion.

Elisha succeeded Elijah as a prophet of a different type.

He was teacher and statesman, using gentler means and guiding the people along the lines of religious education.

The instance in which he appears in the lesson illustrates the place and power of the man of ideas in a kingdom. He commanded no army, and yet he thwarted an army and caught it helpless in his hand and then saved it and sent it back home. No glittering bayonets obeyed his bidding, but invisible hosts of heaven wheeled into line and pitched their tents around his city and were his undefeatable defence.

The true prophet of God is allied with forces of which men of the world do not dream, and the world is full of invisible energies that are ready to rush to his defence and fulfil the purposes of God.

Elisha exhibited a noble spirit in the kindly way in which he dealt with his captured enemies, and we need more of this spirit in our modern world in all our relations, personal and industrial, national and international.

Crushing an enemy or any one in our power may be the worst thing for ourselves we can do with him, and treating him justly and generously will reward us liberally and may prove our own salvation in the day of our trial and judgment.

Amos and Hosea were rural prophets, men of rude speech and brave spirit who struck high and spared no class. They would be troublesome men in some of our modern churches, and many a congregation would pray that they might depart out of their coasts because of their unsparing denunciation of personal behaviour and social wrongs.

But we need such men and should give them full room and liberty and heed rather than hinder their ministry.

3. The Decline of the Southern Kingdom

We are introduced in this Quarter to the southern kingdom of Judah at its very darkest period when Athaliah, daughter of the infamous Jezebel of the northern kingdom, had led Judah down into the same idolatrous degradation.

The murderous queen, when she succeeded to the throne, sought to put all rivals and successors out of the way by one fell slaughter, including even her own grandchildren; but one infant was hidden and protected from her fury.

> **The dramatic incidents by which this boy was brought to the throne and crowned are related in an intense narrative, and its lessons stand out for our warning and guidance.**

The high priest Jehoiada was the man of the hour equal to the critical occasion, and he laid the plans and called the captains and put the program through.

> **The priest and preacher must sometimes be a man of action, even of political and military action, and know how to use the proper and necessary means to attain his spiritual ends.**

Jehoiada did a pregnant and decisive thing when he put David's spears and shields in the hands of his soldiers and thereby thrilled them as they touched these historic arms that were electric with the very spirit of David himself.

> **In all our conflicts our fathers and all our religious prophets and heroes are ready to come to our aid and inspire us with their presence.**

In due time the great prophet Isaiah appeared on the scene of the southern kingdom to teach and warn it as it was already on the decline that rapidly led downward.

Successive waves of the vast Assyrian sea were now beginning to break upon the frontiers of Judah, as they had already submerged Samaria, and Isaiah prophesied in view of their oncoming tides.

He sought to sustain and comfort Judah with promises of divine protection and deliverance against the encircling Assyrian army: "For I will defend this city, to save it."

That night swift judgment fell upon the Assyrians in the form of some pestilence or blast from the divine nostrils, and the next morning they lay dead in masses of corpses in their camp.

It was a notable deliverance, and the Assyrian general went home in defeat to meet a murder at the hands of his own sons. God often moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform.

4. Fall and Captivity

Samaria fell in 722 B. C., and the ten tribes were carried into captivity in Assyria, where they practically disappear and have become known as "The Ten Lost Tribes." They probably became merged in and amalgamated with the Assyrian population, whereas the captives of Judah were colonized in Babylon and preserved their identity and in time returned to Jerusalem.

Jeremiah lived in Jerusalem during its last degenerate days and was involved in its final siege and fall in 586 B. C.

He was in the hard situation of a prophet who had to tell the truth when the truth seemed unpatriotic and treasonable.

This inflamed the people and infuriated them into a mob in which reason was overridden and violent action took its place.

The prophet remained uncowed and made a brave defence.

At this point the princes or rulers of the people appeared on the scene and restrained the violence of the mob.

They appealed to history and warned against the results of violence.

The action of these princes illustrates the need of restraints in popular government to check hasty judgment and mob action.

The psychology of the crowd has become an interesting and instructive recent study and shows us how easily reason may be unhorsed, and blind and dangerous passion may have its way.

The mob spirit is one of our most dangerous and disgraceful American traits and puts us in a bad light before the world.

We should stand up against it, and especially should we seek so to educate and Christianize our people that they will practice self-restraint and judge righteous judgment.

Babylonian exile and captivity followed the fall of Jerusalem, which was attended with unspeakable horrors, and then fifty years were spent in this dark and bitter night.

Ezekiel went into exile with the people and comforted them with assurances that the Good Shepherd would regather them into their own pleasant land of mountains and rivers where they would "sleep in the woods" and receive "showers of blessing."

5. Return and Restoration

The exiled Jews returned to their country and city in relays. Ezra led the first company and set about the work of rebuilding the city.

He began with "the house of the Lord" and first set up the altar and started worship so that work and worship went on together.

This is the first point and right way to begin anything: dedicate it to the Lord, baptize it with prayer, and it will then proceed under the divine guidance and blessing.

It was a joyous work in which the workers engaged and they cheered and stimulated it with songs of gladness.

Yet sadness also mingled tears with their songs, for some of the older men wept when they compared the rude foundations of the new house of worship with the glory of the former temple.

Pessimism and optimism can spring out of the same facts according as we look at them in a spirit of depression or of hope.

The work was finished and on the great day of dedication the people blew their most jubilant trumpets.

Nehemiah next arrived on the scene and under his administration the people called for the reading of the law of Moses, and a

great community Bible study was held at which the first pulpit was erected, and this mode of preaching began its great career, which is still the most efficient way of spreading the knowledge of the Lord.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. When is division either in the state or church justifiable?
2. What part did the prophets play in Hebrew life and who are their successors in our day?
3. How are we to detect the decline of religion in our time?
4. Give examples of other nations that fell into captivity.
5. What city and kingdom are we now building in the world and how are we to carry on this work?

INTRODUCTION TO THE THIRD QUARTER

In passing from the Second to the Third Quarter we again pass from the shadows of the Old into the morning light of the New Testament.

The Old Testament was necessary and good in its day, but its shadows served their day and purpose in foreshadowing the substance and realities of the gospel.

The picture language and symbols of the childhood of our religion now give way to its living truth and grace.

And a wide and wonderful preparation has been made in the pagan world for the coming of the true Light. Babylon and Egypt, the world empires of the Old Testament, have fallen into obscurity, weighed down and overthrown by their own iniquities, the glory of Greece has faded, and Rome fills the world out to its utmost known horizon with its empire, unifying it with its iron hand within its rigid ring and hushing it into universal peace in which the gospel can be heard and have free course over the earth.

Pagan faiths have proved their futility to answer the deepest questions and longings of the human soul and are everywhere at this hour in the history of the world dying a slow and often a pathetic death.

Thus the hand of God in history has shaped all things into convergence upon the great event and pivotal point of the ages from which all the events in our calendar are dated, the birth of Christ.

In the lessons of this Quarter we have only selected scenes and sayings from the wonderful Life which is the Light of the world. We witness the birth and boyhood of Jesus, his baptism and temptation, see him win his first disciples and work his first miracle, witness his holy indignation with which he clears out of the temple the noisy tradesmen who were desecrating its sacred precincts, hear his two great and wonderful discourses delivered to single hearers, go with him as he removes the scene of his ministry from Judea to Galilee, see him heal a nobleman's son, listen to his first public sermon in his home synagogue in Nazareth, and follow him as he settles

down in Capernaum to spend about one half of his whole ministry in that lake port and fishing town.

Words show their wonderful power in recreating all these scenes and sayings for us so that we virtually are present on these occasions and see and hear these things for ourselves.

These words in effect dissolve the words of Jesus in our souls so that we are filled with his ideas and moved with his feelings and are thus molded and fashioned into his likeness.

It is a great privilege we have to study and then to teach these lessons, and we should do it with consecration and with joy.

THIRD QUARTER

The Life of Jesus (Harmony of the Gospels)

I. Opening Period of Christ's Ministry

(First Quarter of a Nine Months' Course)

LESSON I.—JULY 6

THE BIRTH OF JESUS

Great Hopes Centered in the Birth of Christ

Golden Text: For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. Luke 2:11.

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 11:1-5.

Lesson Material: Luke 1:5—2:39; John 1:1–14.

Lesson Text: Luke 2:7–20

7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid.

10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

12 And this *shall be* a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,

14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

16 And they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

17 And when they had seen *it*, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.

18 And all they that heard *it* wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

19 But Mary kept all these things, and pondered *them* in her heart.

20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. *Angels and Shepherds.*
2. *The Good News.*
3. *The Sign of the Swaddling Clothes.*
4. *The Angel Chorus.*
5. *Let Us Go.*
6. *The Babe.*

This wonderful story never loses its charm and is the one universal piece of news that everywhere is welcome. In our own country and in far strange lands, down under burning tropics and up along frozen northern shores, it tells its message of gladness and floods the world with joy.

Our age is eager for news, the cry of the newsboy is ever in the air, we snatch the latest papers damp from the press, but the greatest and most interesting news in the world today is the old and yet ever new story that was first told to shepherds at Bethlehem.

1. Angels and Shepherds

Earth was unconscious of this divine birth, but heaven knew it. There was holy ecstasy in all the shining ranks above, and angels came, as birds in the spring, in songful mood to scatter the music of the good news over the earth.

The Christ-child was born, and now the problem was to get the news into the world.

Where shall the angels begin, what human ears shall first hear the wondrous tidings?

Let them go to Jerusalem, we would have said, and call upon the High priest and first take him into their confidence, and then let them go to the temple and stand amidst the splendors of that holy sanctuary and announce to the assembled priests and scribes that prophecy was fulfilled and their long-expected Messiah had come.

Shall not some respect be paid to official places and dignitaries? Has not God ordained priests and presbyters through whom he dispenses his grace and administers his kingdom?

Yet history witnesses that at times few men stand in God's way more than ecclesiastics.

They are rarely the men that hear a new message: God must usually tell it to somebody else first.

One of the most startling things in the Bible is the fact that the announcement of Christ's birth was made, not to priests, but to shepherds. The gospel was first preached, not in a church, but in a pasture field where there were more sheep than men to hear.

What a rebuke and warning is this to our ministerial pretension and pride! God can easily dispense with us and may pass us by to speak to some humbler soul.

The great people up in the temple have no monopoly of his grace, and it may break out in some wholly unexpected place. The gospel is no respecter of persons. It may be preached in a costly church or a stately cathedral, but it is equally at home in a country school house or an extemporized wooden tabernacle or in a sheep pasture.

In simplicity and catholicity it is adapted to all classes and conditions of life. It has the same message for priest and people, prince and peasant, scholar and shepherd, and all may receive from it an equal welcome and blessing.

2. The Good News

On the night of the nativity these shepherds were in the field keeping watch over their flocks, for those engaged in the lowliest duties may receive a splendid heavenly visitation. The sleeping sheep lay like drifted snow on the ridges, all things around them were wrapped in slumber and silence, and the shepherds had no premonition that the great event for which the ages had grown into readiness was near. The sky was as calm and the stars burned as serene as on other nights, and yet the heavens were tense with expectation and were about to break into celestial song.

Suddenly a mysterious visitor appeared and an unearthly glory shone around them as though the splendor of heaven were pouring down through the rent sky.

The simple-minded shepherds were sore afraid, as wiser people would have been.

"Fear not," was the first word of the angel.

Sin has sown such fear in the world that our heavenly Father himself must not come too near us, even to rescue us, without calling out as he approaches, Fear not!

There are great reasons for fear in this world, but the coming of Jesus into it is not one of them.

His only mission is to release us from the bondage of sin and death and fill us with that perfect love that casts out fear.

What can fulfil so great a promise as to free us from fear? What is the "good tidings of great joy" the angels came to announce? "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

Are we a bit disappointed? Does this announcement fall below our expectations? Were we rather looking for some material blessing, richer harvests and finer houses that would increase the wealth and comfort of the world?

If so, we were looking in the wrong direction and were missing the world's true need. Sin is the root of all our troubles, economic, social and political, and nothing else can do us so much good as a Saviour who cleanses us from our sin.

God made no mistake in his Christmas gift to the world and gave us the greatest possible blessing when he gave us Christ.

3. The Sign of the Swaddling Clothes

Definite directions were given for finding the newborn Saviour. In the city of David the shepherds would find a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

The angelic message was not simply a song in the air, a halo of heavenly light, a fading vision, but it bound itself down to definite places and circumstances and left something substantial.

Christianity is historical and roots itself down in reality as solid as the rocky ridge of Judea.

It is not a beautiful legend or myth, but it fits itself into the rigid framework of history and gives names and dates and places. It was not done in a corner and is not afraid of facts.

The babe was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger.

Jesus was a true human child and took upon him our form down to his infant clothes.

We might have expected that he would have been laid on softest down and covered with silken empurpled robes, but the Saviour of the world did not separate himself from common humanity by any such mark of distinction.

He was closer to the great heart of the world in that manger than he would have been in a golden couch up in a palace.

The Christ is a great wonder in his divine personality, but we can understand his swaddling clothes.

Christianity is not all mystery, but it also comes down close around us and embodies itself in many plain facts and duties.

"Ye shall find the babe." The shepherds were not left to wander around in search of the child, but were given clear directions that led straight to his manger.

Christ is not hidden from us, we do not have to grope after him in uncertainty but can go immediately to him, and every soul that seeks him shall find him.

4. The Angel Chorus

The announcement of the angel was accompanied with a chorus of heavenly voices that broke from the gallery of the sky. A shower of song fell upon the rude shepherds.

Kings and artists never heard such a concert, yet it was rendered in a sheep pasture.

Artists are generally particular about whom they will entertain, and a high price is asked for tickets to their concerts, but angels do not demand cultivated hearers and will sing for anybody and in any place, even in a sheep pasture, and no tickets of admission are required and no money is asked.

Heaven's best gifts are open to all without money and without price.

The angels' chorus is a broad interpretation of the meaning of Christ's birth. It first ascribes glory to God, for all good things come from God and manifest his glory as the light manifests the glory of the sun.

This glory of God then manifests itself in peace and good will among men, even as the glory of the sun manifests itself in the green verdure and blossoming fields and fruit-laden trees of our earth.

The glory of God and the peace of men are never in antagonism, but are always complementary and harmonious; they are the root and fruit, the two parts of the same song.

They cannot be separated and must go together; if we have the one we shall have the other; in glorifying God we work peace among men, and in working peace among men we glorify God.

5. Let Us Go

The song died away in the solemn silence and the shepherds were left alone.

It was a critical moment with them. Shall they follow the vision, or shall they let it vanish with the last echo of the song and relapse into the old dull routine?

No, they did not let it pass and life was never the same to them again. "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us."

They translated message into action and presently were climbing the rocky slope to Bethlehem.

They were not simply content to hear of so great a wonder but were bent on seeing it. Had these shepherds not followed up the message, their knowledge of their Messiah would have stopped right there.

We hear divine messages enough, but too often we let them fade into the light of the common day and pass into forgetfulness.

The grandest vision that ever swept through our brain or illuminated our sky leaves no vestige of worth unless it is turned into conduct and character.

Seeing is believing, and this is the simplicity and saving power of the gospel.

6. The Babe

Promise was exactly matched with fulfilment. "Ye shall find a babe," was the promise of the angel, and now the record reads, "And they came with haste and found the babe."

When did God ever lead us by explicit promise or implicit instinct to expect anything and then disappoint us?

He gave us thirst that urges us to seek water, and we find sparkling springs and streams. He gave us hunger for bread, and we find fruitful field and orchard. He gave us a craving for love, and he hath set the solitary in families.

He hath set eternity in our hearts that urges us to cry, "Shew us the Father and it sufficeth us."

Shall all these lower needs be satisfied, and this supreme search and cry of the soul be disappointed and mocked?

"Ye shall find a babe," is the answer to this promise.

God sends us with all our deep cravings and mysterious longings to that cradle in Bethlehem, where they will be exactly matched and fulfilled.

He that hath seen Christ hath seen the Father.

There is room around him for us all; there is fulness in him to satisfy all our need, and no one seeking him sincerely shall be turned empty away.

The shepherds, having seen for themselves, immediately began to make known abroad the saying which was told them concerning the child.

The gospel is expansive and cannot be shut up in the heart. We no sooner receive it than we begin to give it.

Let us now go unto Bethehem while the song is in the air and see this thing which is come to pass, and we shall return glorifying and praising God.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. Mention other angel ministries in connection with Jesus.
2. Why are we so eager to hear news?
3. How can we determine the relative importance of news?
4. What does the humanity of Jesus do for us?
5. Show how the glory of God and the peace of men work together.
6. How can we go to Bethlehem and what can we do when we come away?

LESSON II.—JULY 13

THE BOYHOOD OF JESUS

Lessons from the Boyhood of Jesus

Golden Text: Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man. Luke 2:52.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 119:9–16.

Lesson Material: Matt. 2:1–23; Luke 2:39

Lesson Text: Luke 2:40–52

40 And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him.
41 Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover.
42 And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.
43 And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not *of it.*
44 But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among *their* kinsfolk and acquaintance.
45 And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him.
46 And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions.
47 And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.
48 And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.
49 And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?
50 And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them.
51 And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.
52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. A Genuine Human Child.
2. Slow Growth in Seclusion.
3. At the Feast in Jerusalem.
4. Astonished Parents.
5. Obedience in the Home.

How little we know about the childhood of the greatest Man that ever lived in this world!

Two or three descriptive verses and one anecdote tell us all we know. We would like to know more: for we are interested in the childhood of great men. We are curious to see whether the stamp of greatness was on them from the beginning, or whether at first they were undistinguishable from other children.

Sometimes genius buds in childhood, as in Mozart and Macaulay, but in other cases it sleeps and is unsuspected for many years. It lies like an explosive in the brain until some match or spark of circumstance touches it off, or like a seed which must wait for its summer.

Precocity is not always a favorable sign, and is often followed by arrested development.

We wonder what may have been the boyhood of Jesus and long for a peep behind the veil.

As usual the apocryphal gospels are most voluble where the inspired gospels are most reticent. They fill the childhood of Jesus with marvels and miracles that are irrational and silly. The broad difference between the books that were put into the Bible and the books that were kept out is one of the wonders and proofs of inspiration.

The gospels hide the childhood of Jesus from our view, giving us only these few verses as a hint of what lies behind the scene. Jesus grew in secret and did not come forth before the world until he was ready for his work.

1. A Genuine Human Child

But while the gospels maintain an impressive silence, yet we know more than they tell us and have considerable general knowledge of the childhood of Jesus.

We know that he was a true human child and grew up through the stages and experiences of human life. He nestled and cooed and smiled in his mother's arms. His "baby hand was pressed against the circle of the breast," and he was lulled to sleep with a cradle song. He took his first tottering steps and invented his first childish words.

He played in his father's carpenter shop and went to the village school.

There were brothers in the home and he grew up with them. He associated with the boys of Nazareth and was full of play.

We draw the line at any wrong thought or act. He was human, and yet he was sinless.

But he was not a grown-up boy, such as we used to find in the Sunday school books, old beyond his years, morbidly self-conscious and pious; but a genuine boy, artless, inquiring, spirited, with his entire nature in free and healthy play.

The whole charm of his boyhood lies in the fact that he was a boy and not something else.

2. Slow Growth in Seclusion

The child grew. Growth is the law of all greatness. The mountains are pushed up an inch at a time, and the tree patiently adds cell to cell.

Human life begins in unconscious infancy and must slowly increase in body and mind up to manhood.

Jesus obeyed this law.

He did not come as a preternatural child, but as an unconscious infant, and then he grew. He was subject to all the laws of growth, physical and mental. In the home and in the carpenter shop, in the school and synagogue, he grew day by day, lesson by lesson, and so increased in stature and wisdom.

He was not crowded forward and overtaxed in his work and growth, but grew slowly and solidly. He took things as they came in their proper order and was not in a hurry.

Thirty years he grew in seclusion before he came forth strong to do his work. He got ready before he began.

Children are often hurried forward too fast and pushed into publicity too soon. Parents are ambitious to have their children show signs of brightness and surpass other children, and they crowd them forward, and often they irreparably injure them and sometimes they kill them.

It is pitiful to see children, through hot-house education or through dress and fashion, despoiled of their youth and made old beyond their years.

Let them grow quietly and take things as they come; they will be young men and women soon enough. Do not thrust them into

excitement and the glare of the world, but keep them in seclusion and let them quietly increase in stature and wax strong in spirit, as Jesus did.

3. At the Feast in Jerusalem

The single recorded incident in the boyhood of Jesus is "a solitary flowret of the wonderful enclosed garden of thirty years." It occurred when he was twelve years of age.

This was a critical age and turning-point in the life of a Jewish boy. At this age he was obliged to learn a trade for his own support; he began to wear the phylacteries; and he became "a son of the law" and was in some degree released from parental control.

He was now thrown upon his own responsibility and began to take care of himself, and this fact throws light upon this incident.

Every year the parents of Jesus went to the feast of the Passover, at Jerusalem, the great religious festival and holiday of the Jews. Jesus had now reached the age when he was under obligation to go with them.

Probably for the first time he stepped out of the seclusion of Nazareth into the publicity of the metropolis. It must have been with emotions of deep wonder and reverence and joy that he entered the holy city and witnessed its scenes and shared in the services of the temple.

He had a boy's interest and delight in the sights of the city, but the center of interest for him was his Father's house.

While at the feast the boy became separated from his parents, and they started home without him, supposing that he was in the caravan with friends, a not unlikely or unusual occurrence.

As he did not appear at the end of the first day's journey, however, they became solicitous and then alarmed and started back to Jerusalem to find him.

On the third day they found him in the temple in the midst of the rabbis, hearing them and asking them questions and displaying such wisdom that all were amazed.

It is a critical hour with a youth when he enters a great city and is left there to himself. Its attractions open before his feet many an alluring path to ruin.

Jesus was susceptible to these temptations, but his religious instinct drew him to his Father's house. He did not leave his religion behind in the village home when he went to the city.

The youth that is true to God in the city is safe.

This scene in the boyhood of Jesus has sometimes been despoiled of its truth and beauty by making it out that he was instructing these rabbis and showing off his superior wisdom. On the contrary, he was hearing them and asking them questions: he was not instructor, but scholar.

Jesus never played the part of a smart boy, but was modest and teachable and kept his place in the presence of superiors; and it was his rare spirit of wisdom and candor that excited the admiration of those that heard him.

A teachable spirit is a beautiful thing in a child, and it is just as beautiful in mature years. It is one of the primary elements of Christian character and of all human greatness.

4. Astonished Parents

The parents were astonished—struck with admiration, as the strong Greek word means—at the scene. Parents are proverbially pleased with and proud of signs of promise in their children, and Mary and Joseph experienced this delight in a rare degree as the religious genius of Jesus began to flash out.

Yet there was also an ominous element in the situation which drew from the anxious mother the chiding question, "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us?"

She realized that the lines of parental influence were slipping from her hands, and that henceforth she could control her boy less and less and that he would act for himself more and more.

That was a painful moment for Mary, and it is a painful moment for every father and mother when they see their children beginning to separate themselves and assert their own individuality and responsibility.

But this is necessary and best for children. Ripened seeds must drop off the tree, or there would be no more trees.

Mary's question elicited from Jesus his first recorded utterance: "How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"

This reply is the kernel of this anecdote, the vital germ that kept it alive and caused it to blossom out in the gospel.

It expresses surprise in the mind of Jesus that his parents did not know that the attractions of the temple had kept him and that there was his proper place and chief business.

We are here brought to the edge of the question, How early did Jesus become conscious of his divinity and his mission as the Messiah?

Into this mystery we cannot penetrate, but at twelve years of age he had firmly grasped the deepest purpose of life. Already his life was perfectly set to the music of his Father's will.

Life with him was not idleness, or wealth, or pleasure, but service in the Father's house.

Many people waste a good portion of life in finding out what they are here for, and some die without ever knowing why they were born.

Young people should discover as early as they can what their mission in life is and should find it in the Father's business.

The parents of Jesus understood not his first recorded utterance—a sad commentary and mournful prophecy. How often has he been misunderstood and misrepresented so that his light has been turned into darkness?

And still the world but little understands him, and very imperfectly do the most Christian minds penetrate into the depth and power of his meaning. His simple words are larger than our largest thoughts of life and love.

5. Obedience in the Home

"And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them:" a wonderful record is this of the Son of God.

This relation of course had in it no element of severity and bondage. There were no unreasonable harsh restraints on the one side, and no waywardness on the other.

Obedience was the disposition and habit and joy of Jesus. He kept the fifth commandment and so increased in favor with God and man.

This was the beginning of that path of obedience that led him all the way through the temptation past the cross up to the throne.

Had he begun by disobeying his earthly father, he would have ended by disobeying his heavenly Father.

Obedience is the foundation stone on which life is built, and it is laid in the home in obeying parents. True obedience is not bondage, but noble liberty. The steel track does not infringe upon the liberty of the locomotive, but gives it all the liberty it has.

Right commandments are the steel tracks along which we can drive ourselves at utmost speed with perfect safety and thus enjoy the fullest liberty.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. Give an account of the village of Nazareth.
2. Give an account of child life among the Jews in the days of Jesus.
3. What dangers beset American youth when they go to the city?
4. How shall young people find out their mission in life?
5. Are our children becoming increasingly self-willed and wayward?
6. Can you trace any of the childhood life of Jesus in his preaching?

LESSON III.—JULY 20

THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

The Meaning of Baptism

Golden Text: Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Mark 1:11.

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 42:1–4

Lesson Material: Matt. 3:1–17; Luke 3:1–22; John 1:19–34

Lesson Text: Mark 1:1–11

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God;
2 As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.
3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.
4 John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.
5 And there went out unto him all the land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.
6 And John was clothed with camel's hair, and with a girdle of a skin about his loins; and he did eat locusts and wild honey;
7 And preached, saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose.
8 I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost.
9 And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan.
10 And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him:
11 And there came a voice from heaven, *saying,* Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. The Preaching of John the Baptist.
2. The Message of Repentance.
3. The Ordinance of Baptism.
4. The Heavens Opened.

This is the first mention of Jesus since he was twelve years of age and now he is thirty: eighteen years of unbroken silence.

But he was growing back there in seclusion, and the unwritten years of his life are as truly a part of his mission as the written Gospels.

He was now ready for his work, and wise is the man, minister, teacher, worker in any field who gets ready before he begins.

A great revival meeting was going on down in the Jordan valley. The preacher was John the Baptist. Nothing had been heard of him also for thirty years during which he was growing up in the hill country of Judea in that seclusion and silence in which all great things grow.

John was a Nazarite, we might call him a monk, a man who had withdrawn himself from society and for years lived a solitary life in the rocky regions around the Dead Sea. His life was close to the earth on its material side, but on its spiritual side it was close to the sky: for he lived in meditation and prayer.

His life was a reaction and protest against the formal hypocritical religion of his time. Disgusted with Pharisaic show and sham he turned from the Jewish church into the wilderness: not that he might have less religion, but more; that out there in the solitude far from men he might get close to God, as Moses did in the mount.

1. The Preaching of John the Baptist

At length, being filled with the Spirit, John suddenly emerged from obscurity and appeared down on the banks of Jordan where he began to preach. His striking personality, rough haircloth robe with its leather strap, uncut hair, flowing beard, and deep-set burning eye, suggested a prophet.

The news reached Jerusalem that there was a prophet down at the Jordan, and the crowds went pouring down the steep rocky roads to hear him. The excitement spread, and the people came from every quarter.

What was the secret of the preacher's power? Not his manner of dress and appearance.

Eccentricities never made a Martin Luther or a John Knox. Long hair does not make a long head.

John the Baptist was a sincere soul touched with the fire of God. He had gotten rid of empty forms and conventionalities and was speaking out his genuine beliefs and deep fiery emotions.

Instead of mumbling traditional dogmas, John spoke living truth from the heart to the heart.

Such preaching created a tremendous sensation and drew people in great crowds. They had been fed on empty husks long enough and wanted bread.

The desiccation of our creed is ever one of the greatest dangers of religion. When the spirit evaporates out of it and leaves it dry and dead, it becomes so much chaff fit only to be burned up or blown away.

We need to keep the sap circulating through our creed and ever breathe the holy breath of God that our faith may keep full of fresh vitality and fruitfulness.

2. The Message of Repentance

The burning message of John was repentance as a preparation for the Messiah, who was about to appear.

Repentance is the reaction of the soul against sin.

The Greek word means "a change of mind," a mental act that reverses the mind and will towards sin. It is thus in its root not an emotion but a volition which we can exercise and for which we are responsible. It is a perception of guilt that grows into a pain and overpowers our love for sin.

Such repentance prepares the way for Christ in our hearts and lives.

Sinful moods and motives, passions and pursuits, are obstructive and antagonistic to the presence of Christ in our souls, and must be uprooted and cast out before his Spirit can come in. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

John also quoted Isaiah to prove his message had ancient authority and divine sanction.

The truth he was preaching was not revolutionary but evolutionary; the new grew out of the old and was its blossoming and fruitage. Isaiah was the original: John was the echo; Isaiah declared the message of repentance: John interpreted and applied it.

3. The Ordinance of Baptism

As an outer sign of inner repentence, John instituted and administered the rite of baptism.

The outer sign represents and confirms the inner act and roots it deeper in the soul.

At this point in his preaching Jesus appeared in the audience of John and offered himself for baptism. John hesitated to administer the rite to him. "I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" (Matt. 3:14). But Jesus persisted, saying, "for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness," and John yielded.

There was some reason why Jesus submitted to this ordinance. He needed it and would not have been perfect without it.

It was not a fictitious performance done for mere show, but a genuine baptism.

We must take this view of the whole life of Jesus. There was no acting or theatrical display in it, but everything in it was real, just what it purported to be. His growth in wisdom was a true process of education. His temptation was not a sham battle but a real fight.

The life of Jesus was genuine in every act and utterance, and there was not a word in it said for mere effect.

The baptism of John was appointed of God, for John was a prophet. It was therefore binding upon all those that acknowledged God and meant to keep his commandments. Jesus was under the law, and therefore under obedience to the ordinances of religion.

These rites he kept from his circumcision in infancy down to the Passover under the shadow of the cross.

Not one of these means of grace did he refuse or neglect.

He did not treat them as being subject to human judgment and taste, but as being of divine appointment and obligation. He did not maintain that because he was holy he did not need these ordinances, but because he was holy he kept them perfectly.

This example of our Lord shows us the necessity of religious ordinances and the duty of observing them.

Objections are made to religious rites as being unnecessary mechanical forms: only the spirit is life.

Undoubtedly the inner spirit is the life of religion, but can we have the inner life without having the external form? At least, can we have it in the same degree of fulness? Can we drink water without using the cup that holds it? Can we have fruit without having fruit trees? We may have trees without fruit, but not fruit without trees.

So we may have ordinances without religion, but not religion without ordinances. Dangerous as ordinances are, we must have them.

Jesus always put vital emphasis on the inner life of religion, but he never did away with outer means; on the contrary he used them himself and enjoined them on others; and whoever declines to use them cannot quote the example and sanction of the Lord Jesus.

The exact meaning of baptism in the case of Jesus needs to be carefully discriminated. As a sign of remission of sin Jesus did not need it, for he had no sins to be remitted.

But the rite was also a sign of entering into the kingdom of God, a mark of consecration to his service, and in this sense Jesus could and did receive it.

Jesus, then, in being baptized showed that he was in the kingdom by accepting its appointed sign, by wearing its badge or uniform and marching under its flag. Baptism applies to us both as a sign of repentance and pardon, and of entering the kingdom.

Baptism is the sign of cleansing, but not the cause of it, for forty baptisms would not wash away one sin.

And by this act we also enroll ourselves among the soldiers of Christ and take our place in his ranks under his flag. We give proof that we are willing to do his will and thus to fulfil all righteousness.

4. The Heavens Opened

Jesus came up out of that baptismal water a new man in a new world.

The heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him and filled him with the fulness of God.

That Spirit that Moses and Isaiah had received in limited measure and fragmentary gifts, he now received without measure and the Godhead dwelt in him bodily.

Then came a voice from heaven, saying, "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

This probably marked the moment when Jesus became fully conscious of his divinity and Messiahship.

Into the mystery of this moment we cannot enter. What glad recognition of the Father, what trembling sense of responsibility, what mighty throb of joy, what overpowering sense of his tremendous endowment he experienced we cannot know.

But through all the days of his ministry and temptation and darkness he must have been made strong and glad with this assurance.

This great blessing came out of his obedience in receiving baptism. Jesus probably had no expectation of this gift when he offered himself for this ordinance. He was then simply doing his duty in fulfilling all righteousness. But he faithfully obeyed it, and, lo, this humble duty suddenly blossomed and bore this wondrous heavenly fruit! Had Jesus never gone down into that baptismal water, he never would have come up under an opened sky with the Holy Spirit streaming down upon him, and God never would have pronounced him his Son.

We never can tell how near we are to unexpected blessing when we are performing a duty, even the humblest.

Saul went out to find his father's asses and he found a kingdom and came home with the anointing oil on his head. Columbus set sail only to find a shorter path to poor old China, and he stumbled upon rich and splendid young America.

The larger purposes of God catch up all our little thoughts and deeds into his great plan and may turn them to worldwide blessing.

Little did the father of Matthew Henry, when at family worship he was making homely comments on the Word of God, dream that he was training up a boy that would one day write commentaries that would long feed the world. Atoms are very little things, eluding the power of our strongest microscopes to bring them within the range of our vision, but enough of them make the continents and the stars, and a single one of them may be a center around which revolve the constellations.

The humblest act faithfully done may be the doorway into the greatest gift of God.

The act of confessing Christ before men may seem to us unimportant and even unnecessary, and yet it may go deep into our lives and may be the door that will let others into the kingdom or a light that will shine far in the world.

Let us not hesitate at any of God's ordinances, or commandments, or opportunities, but, however trivial or unnecessary or hard it may seem, fulfil all righteousness, and then, as we come up from the service, we also in some degree shall see heaven opened and the Spirit of God descending upon us, and shall know that we are God's beloved sons in whom he is well pleased.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. What is the use of solitude in our lives?
2. Name all the elements of power in John the Baptist.
3. Why must repentance precede righteousness?
4. What other ordinance than baptism does Christianity have and what is its significance?
5. Give other instances in which humble duties led to great results.

LESSON IV.—JULY 27

THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS

Victory over the Tempter

Golden Text: For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted. Hebrews 2:18.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 124

Lesson Material: Mark 1:12–13; Luke 4:1–13

Lesson Text: Matthew 4:1–11

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.
2 And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward a hungered.
3 And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.
4 But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.
5 Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple,
6 And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in *their* hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.
7 Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.
8 Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;
9 And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.
10 Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.
11 Then the devil leaveth him, and behold, angels came and ministered unto him.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. The Occasion of the Temptation.
2. Bread from Stones.
3. A Leap from the Temple.
4. A Vision from a Mountain.
5. The Written Word.

There are sudden and violent changes of weather in the spiritual world. It was while coming down from the mount where for forty days he had fasted and held communion with God that Moses lost his temper and smashed the tables of the law to pieces. It was just after leaving the first communion table that Peter denied his Lord and swore that he did not know him.

The purest deed may be bordered with temptation; our finest moods may be marred by an evil suggestion. When God is especially close to us, Satan is near by waiting for his chance.

Immediately after his baptism Jesus was led up into the wilderness to be tempted. Baptism and temptation are here crowded close together. Scarcely had the voice from heaven died away when a whisper was heard from hell.

Out of the baptismal benediction of the Father, Jesus stepped into a desperate struggle with the devil.

Jesus was led up of the Spirit to be tempted. His temptation was no accident or evil fate, but a divine appointment. Temptation has its place and use in the world.

There is nothing wrong in being tempted: the wrong begins only when we begin to consent to it.

Yet we are not to run into temptation of our own accord. We may not hunt the devil or go into his den ourselves.

The path of duty as we are led of the Spirit will take us into temptation enough.

It was when Jesus was hungry and wasted with forty days' fasting and was reduced to the lowest point of physical exhaustion that this temptation struck him.

Satan did not assault him at his strongest moment, but at his frailest hour when his vitality was at its lowest ebb. Satan knows a man's weakest time and waits for it. There are dangerous low tides in the strongest life.

The best man has his hours when he would not dare meet the devil.

These irresolute moments are often connected with bodily exhaustion and nervous depression. We need to keep a constant grip on the strength of God that when we are weak we may be strong.

1. The Occasion of the Temptation

Before the conflict begins, let us take a general view of it and consider its occasion and meaning. What was the situation and state of mind of Jesus at this time?

He had just come up from his baptism which probably marked the moment when he became fully conscious of his Messiahship and divinity and supernatural power.

He now knew that he was the Son of God at whose bidding stones would turn to bread and water into wine. Seized and overwhelmed with this mighty consciousness, Jesus went into the wilderness to meditate upon and determine how he was to handle this tremendous power.

What would be the first, most natural, strongest and most deadly temptation in the possession of such power? To use it selfishly for personal ends.

This is a temptation that always arises in connection with the sudden acquisition of power, as when a man gains great wealth or high office.

Sudden power of any kind puts a severe strain on character and is a dangerous possession.

The question pressing on the mind of Jesus may have been, How would he use his divine power? For personal comfort and aggrandizement? or only in the service of God for the salvation of the world? It was a critical and perilous moment with him.

If he were to use his power the one way he would be himself lost; if he were to use it the other way the world would be saved.

Satan saw this psychological moment, and he was there to try to push Jesus off the edge of the right use of his power into the bottomless pit. The selfish use of power was the poisoned point of each of these three arrows of temptation that Satan shot at Jesus.

2. Bread from Stones

"If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread."

The very tip of this temptation is a doubt.

This was also the poisoned point of the first arrow of temptation Satan shot into the world so that he has invented no new or improved no old weapon in thousands of years.

"Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" Doubt is often the mother of disobedience. Get us to doubt God and truth and duty, and it is a short and easy step into sin.

Jesus, having fasted forty days, craved food in every fiber of his body, and Satan kindled his appetite into a veritable fire with the thought of fresh, fragrant bread. The proposal was that he should get bread, not by taking it away from others, but by creating it himself.

How innocent and reasonable and right and necessary this seemed! But Jesus saw through its false innocence into its black heart.

For it was a temptation to use his power for his own gratification, and if he did this once he would do it again, and in thus saving his life he would lose it.

Deeper still, this was practical distrust of God. Would not the Father provide, and shall he in the very first extremity cut loose from God and take care of himself?

So this seemingly innocent act would have been his first step away from God.

Therefore Jesus smote the evil thought with the trustful declaration, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God;" and that temptation lay dead at his feet.

But it is not dead for us.

Appetite is still for Satan our most vulnerable point of attack. He not only plays upon our natural and rightful appetites, but he has created new and false ones with which he destroys men.

And how artfully is the plea of necessity made! "I must make a living and therefore must continue in this evil business. I must compete with rivals and therefore cannot be too scrupulous about methods."

The necessity for bread is thus supposed to make any wrong right and to wipe out the whole decalogue.

Anything to get a living and make money is the devil's creed.

But it is not necessary that we should live at all. There is only one moral necessity upon us: to trust God and keep his commandments.

3. A Leap from the Temple

"If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee."

This temptation is just the opposite of the first one.

Defeated on one side, Satan slips around and attacks Jesus on the other. The first temptation was that Jesus should trust God too little: this one is that he should be presumptuous and trust God too much.

It was a suggestion that he could fly from the appointed path of obedience to the laws of life off at any angle of wild caprice, that he could do just as he pleased, and God would keep him.

Even faith may be presumptuous and disobedient.

We want God to keep us, not in all his ways, but in all our ways.

The faith cure, in so far as it refuses or neglects to use natural means, is virtually a proposal to jump from the pinnacle of natural law without getting hurt, to set natural laws at defiance and expect God to work a miraculous deliverance.

This temptation also involved the use of Christ's power for a personal end. For the object seems to have been that he should gain the popular applause of the multitude and thereby get himself accepted as the Messiah; it was another short cut by which he was to leap into popularity.

The Jews wanted a Messiah that would come ostentatiously in power

and pomp: and this advent from the temple would be received with such popular enthusiasm and acclamation that it would make Jesus king at a jump.

But he saw through this the proposal, also, and smote it with the declaration, " Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God; " and another poison-tipped arrow had failed to pierce the armor of Jesus and fell harmless at his feet.

4. A Vision from a Mountain

From a mountain top Satan showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and said unto him, "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me."

This was an appeal to Christ's human ambition, holding up before him a glittering, dazzling prize.

It was offering him another short cut to the universal kingdom he had come to gain through the slow pathway of the cross.

It was a temptation to resort to worldly means to get the unworldly kingdom.

Why not win the kingdom in a moment by one little act, even get the whole world at a word?

How frequent and strong is this temptation with us! Satan spreads out before us, not all the kingdoms of this world, but only some little portion of it: as much as we can see from our doorstep, or over our counter or office desk; and we want it, and many are willing to bend the knee to the devil to get it.

How strong is the temptation to take the short cut to our ambitions.

The way of righteous getting, of slow growth, of patient toil and sacrifice, the way of the cross, is not to our liking. We want the kingdom at a stroke and are in danger of selling our souls to get it.

Jesus felt the full force of this temptation. He gazed upon the splendid picture of that outspread world. Perhaps the inner meaning of the Satanic

suggestion was that he should adopt worldly means, seize the sword and cut his way to a kingdom as Alexander and Caesar had done.

He saw how short was the step that promised a throne.

Then turning in resistless might, he tore the mask from his tempter, revealed him in his hideous nakedness as Satan, bade him from his presence and declared his eternal allegiance and loyalty to God.

The Son of God was still untouched: not one fleck had spotted the immaculate whiteness of his soul. And the devil, foiled, defeated and crushed, fled and vanished into the infinite darkness whence he came.

5. The Written Word

Mark the means by which Jesus resisted these temptations: "It is written." "It is written." "It is written."

The Word of God was his shield, and by it every flaming dart was quenched.

Yet it was not by the mere quoting of Scripture that Jesus defended himself, for the devil could quote Scripture too. It was by his grip on the realities back of the words that he conquered.

The sense of God's Fatherhood, trust in him, steady, sober obedience to him, unswerving loyalty to him, were his support and victory.

He conquered by the ordinary means of grace. He did not call into action his divinity, but he bore this temptation in his humanity. He was tempted as we are, and he conquered as we may. We need no new weapons to resist Satan, for still "it is written."

The old Bible furnishes shields and swords to match all the temptations of modern life.

What we need in our temptations is a stronger grasp on these eternal verities of God's Word. In proportion as we believe and feel these truths

shall we have power to resist evil; and when our whole consciousness is filled with them Satan cannot find anything in us to lay hold of and cannot touch us.

Resist the devil and he will flee from you; and when he is gone, the angels of God will come.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. Does every one have his own weak points, and what are some of the most common ones?
2. What are some wrong ways in which we may get bread?
3. What are some kinds of objectionable sensationalism in religion?
4. What are some mountains of tempting visions with us?
5. How may we use the Bible as a sword and shield in temptation?

LESSON V.—AUGUST 3

THE FIRST DISCIPLES OF JESUS

Winning Others to Christ

Golden Text: Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me. John 1:43.

Devotional Reading: Proverbs 3:13-18.

Lesson Material: Matt. 4:18-22; 9:9; Mark 1:14-20; Luke 5:1-11.

Lesson Text: John 1:35–51

35 ¶ Again the next day after, John stood, and two of his disciples;
36 And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!
37 And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.
38 Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou?
39 He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour.
40 One of the two which heard John *speak*, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.
41 He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ.
42 And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone.
43 ¶ The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me.
44 Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.
45 Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.
46 And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see.
47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!
48 Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.
49 Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.
50 Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these.
51 And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. The Lamb of God.
2. Come and See.

3. Brother Wins Brother.
4. Follow Me.
5. Any Good Thing out of Nazareth?

While Jesus was up in the wilderness being tempted, John the Baptist continued his work down in the Jordan Valley.

At length the ecclesiastical authorities up in Jerusalem thought it was time to look into the affair, and they sent a committee down to investigate. The committee interviewed John and questioned him closely as to who he was, but with beautiful honesty and humility he "confessed, and denied not; and he confessed, I am not the Christ," and declared, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord, as said Isaiah the prophet."

At this juncture Jesus returned from the wilderness to the Jordan and again came into the presence of John.

1. The Lamb of God

As the Baptist stood with two of his disciples, one of whom was Andrew and the other was doubtless John the author of this Gospel, he pointed them to Jesus and exclaimed, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"

Jesus as yet had wrought no miracle and had delivered no discourses, he had given no sign of his divinity and had not unsealed his lips as to his mission, but he was stamped with such lofty spirituality and heavenly grace that John discerned in him the son of God.

> Here is a prophet in the flood tide of his popularity and success pointing his disciples away from himself to another. He could see the coming man and knew how to retire before him gracefully.

John was now the central figure in Judea, and all eyes were turned to him in expectation. It seemed that a splendid crown was within his grasp. Why not announce himself as the Messiah and seize this crown? Yet he deliberately rejected it and placed it upon the brow of another.

> He appreciated the solitary and supreme greatness of Jesus and cast his own crown at his feet. "He must increase, but I must decrease. He that cometh from above is above all."

In pronouncing him the Lamb of God, John revealed Jesus as the final fulfilment of the old dispensation.

The paschal lamb, that had so long stained the altar with its blood but could not wash away sin, had accomplished its purpose in preparing for the true Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.

The ideas shadowed forth in type and symbol, psalm and prophecy, were now realized. The century plant had at last bloomed. And John, great as he was, blotted himself out, gave his place to Jesus, and sent his own disciples to him.

2. Come and See

The two disciples turned from John and followed Jesus. They were not so attached to their master that they could not yield to the power of a superior attraction.

"The Lamb of God" would be the fulfilment of their highest hopes, and they resolved to become acquainted with him.

Jesus turned around and asked them, "What seek ye?" This question is a test of conduct and character, and its answer is a self-revelation.

What a man seeks shows what he is.

The savage seeks plunder, the dissolute man seeks intoxication, the scholar seeks truth, and the saint seeks God.

When one seeks Jesus he reveals an inner impulse after the highest goodness.

The two disciples answered, "Master, where dwellest thou?" Jesus answered, "Come and see."

This conversation was all natural, easy and courteous. There were no pompous formalities to be observed, but these men met on the simplest terms of human friendship.

Jesus would have us come to him in the same confidence, and he has given us free access to God himself.

The two disciples accepted the hearty invitation of Jesus and abode with him that day. From ten o'clock in the morning until the evening shadows

fe l, Jesus and Andrew and John engaged in earnest conversation concerning the Messiah and his kingdom; and when they separated Jesus had bound two disciples to himself with cords of faith and friendship that never broke.

There was no revival meeting, or religious excitement, in connection with these conversions, but in the privacy and quietness of a personal interview these men gave their hearts to Christ.

It is not necessary to engage in public preaching and sway great audiences in order to save men: a private word may be equally effective in drawing a soul into the kingdom.

"Come and see," is the invitation and promise of Jesus. He does not ask us to accept him blindly on mere authority, but on the ground of personal investigation and experience.

Christ would have us try his gospel and judge it by its results. He is not afraid of being known. He will bear acquaintance.

If any one is willing to do his will, he shall know of his doctrine that it is of God.

Brother Wins Brother

Jesus gained the first two disciples himself; and now these disciples started out to gain others. Andrew found Simon his brother, and brought him to Jesus. If John found his brother James at the same time, the number of disciples doubled the first day.

Andrew, full of the joy of his own discovery, hastened to his brother with the announcement, "We have found the Messias!"

That was glad news to a Jew, and Andrew could not keep it to himself, but immediately imparted it to his brother; "and he brought him to Jesus."

Jesus found Andrew, Andrew found Simon: this is the way the kingdom grows, each converted man finding the next one.

Jesus began the process, and his own converts carried it on. As the Father sent him into the world, so he sent his disciples into the world.

Christians are Christ multiplied and continued.

Andrew found his brother, and kinship and friendship are natural lines of connection along which the gospel still works. Ties of blood are powerful cords drawing others into the kingdom.

God does not mean that these ties, which are so sweet and strong in this world, should be sundered in the next world. But kinship and friendship are not immortal until they are bound up in the same bundle of life with Christ.

Jesus looked upon Simon with searching insight and said, "Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone." Peter means rock, and the new name described the new nature that he was to receive through his fellowship with Jesus.

Unstable and impulsive on the surface, there was yet lying deep in Peter a bed of rock that became a foundation of solid steadfastness in the kingdom of God.

There are too many Christians of clay: Christ wants Christians of rock.

Andrew remained an obscure disciple, while Peter began to shine with brilliance and became conspicuous and forever famous, the one disciple revolving around the other as a mere satellite and known as "Simon Peter's brother."

Yet it was the obscure brother that drew the brilliant brother within the attraction of the Sun of Righteousness and thus made him luminous.

We may not be flaming apostles and shining lights ourselves, but we may draw others to Christ that may become conspicuous in his service.

All that we bring to Christ shall shine by his light and shall thus help to light up the world.

4. Follow Me

On the next day Jesus started for Galilee, for he was not a recluse hiding in the wilderness, like John, but he carried on his ministry in the busy haunts of men.

Presently he fell in with Philip, who may also have been returning from the preaching of John the Baptist and was in the right mood to receive the Messiah.

Jesus said to him, "Follow me." Philip joined the little company of disciples, and thus it grew even as it passed along the public road. Andrew and John sought Jesus, but Jesus sought Philip.

All are not brought into the kingdom in the same way, by the same means and with the same experiences, but there are differing means and methods, and every conversion is stamped with some mark of individuality.

"Follow me," is the invitation that Christ gives to every one and is the tie by which he would bind every one to himself.

These first disciples followed Jesus outwardly by living with him under his teaching and influence. They thus were molded into his likeness and filled with his spirit and prepared for their great work of preaching the gospel. We cannot now follow Jesus after this manner, but we can none the less really and vitally follow him in faith and fellowship so as to grow into his image and be fitted for his service.

We must all follow some one as our leader and master, and we find the right path and highest leadership when we follow Jesus as our Master and Lord.

5. Any Good Out of Nazareth?

Again the process of one convert finding another started. "Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, we have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

This speech shows that Philip was a student of the Scriptures and knew what to look for in the Messiah, and that he found these marks fulfilled in Jesus.

But this announcement that sprang from a heart of joy and full of good intention instantly struck a snag and stirred up prejudice in Nathanael's mind. "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" he incredulously inquired. He was from Cana (John 21:2), a neighboring village, and doubtless shared the prejudice that one town often entertains against another. So he met the gladdest announcement that could come to a Jew with the rebuff, "You do not mean to say that the Messiah could come out of that disreputable town of Nazareth, do you?"

Personal rivalries and petty prejudices can insinuate themselves into all our judgments and may tincture with their bitterness and poison even the very news we should receive with joy.

Prejudice in its myriad forms is still one of the greatest obstructions in the way of the gospel. Prejudice against Christian faith on account of its mysteries and difficulties, prejudice against the church on account of the inconsistencies of its members, many are the objections that a prejudiced mind can interpose against the call of Christ.

Had Philip undertaken to argue this point with Nathanael he might have gotten the worst of the argument; at least he would probably only have confirmed Nathanael in his prejudice. But his simple answer was, "Come and see," try this Messiah for yourself.

Nathanael acted upon this reasonable proposal, and, after a brief interview with him and a personal experience of his fellowship, he exclaimed, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the king of Israel."

What no amount of controversy could have done, simple seeing for himself did do.

This is still Christ's own proposal for the solution of all our doubts and difficulties and prejudices. Let us honestly go to him and try his doctrine and way of life, and we shall know it is of God and will accept him as Lord and King.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. What was the significance of the lamb as an offering in the temple?
2. In what ways does the gospel prove itself when tried by us?
3. How does the principle of using affection in leading others to Christ apply in the home and in friendship?
4. In what definite ways may we follow Christ?
5. How can we know and overcome our prejudices?

LESSON VI.—AUGUST 10

THE FIRST MIRACLE OF JESUS

Jesus Enriching Social Life

Golden Text: Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it. John 2:5.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 108: 1–6

Lesson Material: John 2: 1–25

Lesson Text: John 2:1–11

And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there:
2 And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage.
3 And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine.
4 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come.
5 His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do *it*.
6 And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece.
7 Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim.
8 And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare *it*.
9 When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was, (but the servants which drew the water knew,) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom,
10 And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: *but* thou hast kept the good wine until now.
11 This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. A Wedding Scene.
2. A Halt in the Feast.
3. Water Turned into Wine.
4. The Best Wine Last.
5. Manifested Glory.

The first miracle of Jesus was not wrought until he was well entered upon his ministry.

He was not impatient to begin this kind of work, but held his power in reserve until his hour was fully come.

And when he did begin he did not scatter supernatural works with a free hand on every side. Miracles did not drip from his fingers. On the contrary, he used them sparingly and kept them in the background. He refused to perform wonders for the purpose of creating sensations and attracting crowds, but worked miracles only for ethical ends.

The Bible does not swarm with miracles, but when we consider the thousands of years its history embraces, they are scarce in its pages.

God does not seem to like a miracle. He prefers ordinary means and methods and can find as much room for working inside of regular laws as outside in extraordinary processes.

Too many miracles would defeat the very purpose of miracles.

Yet miracles have a place in the plan of redemption, and Jesus used them.

There is no difficulty in believing in miracles if we believe in God and see a sufficient purpose back of them.

Who knows where the natural leaves off and the supernatural begins? Miracles attended the ministry of Jesus as signs and proofs of his divinity. They were sparks flashing out from his omnipotence.

But deeper still, they were illustrations of his power to heal and save. They were works of benevolence and were vital parts of his gospel.

The hand of Jesus was potent as lightning, and yet it never touched a human hair with harm, but was as gentle and safe as a mother's caress to her babe. His physical miracles were shadows of the spiritual miracles he works within the soul and in society.

Viewed in this light, this first miracle of Jesus was especially significant, for it foreshadowed the whole character of his ministry.

The first miracle of Moses was turning water into blood, and this symbolized the old dispensation which was one of law and judgment.

The first miracle of Jesus was turning water into wine, and this symbolized the new dispensation which is one of larger liberty and richer life.

1. A Wedding Scene

The scene opens in a home and the occasion was a marriage festival. From the Jordan, with his five or six disciples, Jesus went to Cana of Galilee,

where a wedding celebration was in progress at which his mother was present and to which he and his disciples were invited.

His presence on this occasion was richly significant.

By this act he at once set himself in bold contrast with his forerunner, John the Baptist. Jesus was not a recluse and an ascetic, separating himself from his human kind, but he was a man of the world, mingling in its currents and sharing in its scenes and festivities.

The Christian is not to keep himself out of the world, though he is to keep himself unspotted from the world.

He is to be in it, but not of it. The Christian ought to share in all pure joys and enjoyments.

To be saved is not to be sad.

Satan has no monopoly of pleasure. Christ came that our joy might be full.

This festal scene was in a home. It was not in a dance hall, or theater. There is something wrong with the home, or with the people in the home, when they have to go away from it to have a good time.

However happy we may be elsewhere, there should be no place like home.

It was a wedding that Jesus sanctioned and graced by his presence. This relation that was first consecrated in Eden and has so often been disordered and broken by sin, is strengthened, enriched and beautified by the gospel.

Jesus had no home of his own, but he came to bring joy into the homes of others, and he is making all homes better.

The ministry that ended with the cross began with a wedding, and this bright beginning was prophetic of its final fruitage in the eternal joy of the marriage supper of the Lamb.

2. A Halt in the Feast

The joy of the occasion was suddenly halted. The wine failed.

The wine of this world always does fail.

Any joy that rests on a material basis cannot last. Only a well of water within us springing up into everlasting life can afford never-failing satisfaction.

Evidently this was not a home of wealth, and perhaps the arrival of unexpected guests had exhausted the moderate supply of wine. The mother of Jesus was quick to appreciate the situation and feel the embarrassment the failure would cause the host.

With delicate tact she said to Jesus, "They have no wine."

This reveals the sympathy of Mary with others in distress. As we look out over the world in all its poverty and ignorance and suffering and sin, upon the hard lives and pitiful condition of our human kind, of how many can we say, They have no wine; and if there is any way in which we can supply their need and brighten their lives, how sympathetic and urgent should we be in using the means to this end!

Mary in applying to Jesus went to the right source, and we can do most for the world through him.

The mother's gentle hint to her son drew a strange answer from Jesus. His reply, however, contains not the slightest discourtesy, but is an intimation that his power cannot be used at the suggestion of another, even of his own mother, and that at the right moment he will act of himself.

We must beware of the faintest appearance of dictating to Christ and must never try to hurry him up.

This principle applies to our prayers and to all our relations to God in his providence.

The mother was satisfied with the answer, and in a spirit of profound and beautiful trust, she directed the servants, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it."

This is the bond of unquestioning obedience that binds the Christian to Christ. We have attained the highest wisdom and the purest peace and the strongest strength when we simply know and do his will. This solves our perplexities and makes our pathway plain.

3. Water Turned into Wine

Presently the moment for action came. Even when God seems to be denying us, the blessing may be near.

Six large stone jars, holding half a barrel each, were standing by. Jesus ordered them to be filled with water, and the servants filled them brimming full. Then at his bidding they drew it out and bore it to the ruler of the feast.

At some point in this process " the conscious water saw its God and blushed," the water reddened into wine.

Into the inner mechanism of this miracle we cannot penetrate, but it is no more mysterious than the chemistry by which water is turned into wine inside the grape. Jesus did in a moment what the sun does in a month.

He who makes the sun ripen wine can make the wine without the sun.

Very practical lessons lie around this point in the miracle. Jesus can supply all our needs. Our extremity is his opportunity.

When the wine of this world has failed and life looks dark, he can give us a blessing that will be as wine to our spirits.

In giving us this blessing he makes use of the means we already have. He took the jars of water that were in the house and with these he made wine. When God would give us more he always begins with what we have. He takes our present powers and means and opportunities and turns them to higher uses and richer results.

And in this process we have a part. The servants filled the jars with water and drew out the wine. Had they put no water in, no wine would have come out.

God has a part for us in all his dealings with us, and in all the blessings he gives us we are coworkers with him.

4. The Best Wine Last

The wine, when tasted by the ruler of the feast, was found to be so fine in flavor that it excited his surprise and drew from him a compliment to the

bridegroom for his generosity in providing such good wine at the end of the feast.

It was customary on such occasions, when the guests had drunk freely and their taste was less discriminating, to offer them wine of inferior quality: "but thou has kept the good wine until now."

All that Christ gives us is of the best quality.

He offers us no cheap goods, he palms off on us no adulterated blessings. He gives us the best his market affords, and his market is the universe, his resources are the unsearchable riches of God.

Christ's grace is the richest wine in all the world, as precious and costly as his own life-blood.

And he gives us his best wine last. The devil gives us his best wine first: at first it giveth its color in the cup and goeth down smoothly, but at last it biteth like a serpent.

The first end of sin is always pleasant: it is the last end that stings. The Christian life grows better and better. It begins on earth and may pass through suffering, but it ends in heaven.

5. Manifested Glory

"This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory." His glory was seen in this work of beneficence that ministered to the comfort and joy of men. He came that the world might have life and have it more abundantly.

His glory was shown in transforming a common and coarse thing into a rare and rich blessing. Water changed into wine is a symbol of all Christ's transforming work.

He changed the old dispensation of law and letter into the new dispensation of liberty and life. He uplifts slavery into freedom, and paganism into Christian civilization. He transmutes sin into penitence, unbelief into faith, the vileness of wickedness into the beauty of holiness, and sinners into saints.

The chemist takes scum and dross and transmutes them into exquisite perfumes and the most beautiful colors. The artist takes coarse materials and transforms them into masterpieces of painting, and the sculptor turns a block of stone into an angel. The poet takes our common words and weaves them into magic lines or builds them into grand cathedrals of poetic thought.

The whitest and most brilliant diamond is only common coal transmuted into a blazing jewel shooting vivid flashes of light.

All that Christ touches he exalts and ennobles.

He brings out the best possibilities in men. Under his divine sunshine and quickening influence the wilderness of this world shall rejoice and blossom as the rose and become the new Paradise of God.

In all these transformations is seen the glory of Christ, as in all the wealth of color on the landscape is seen the glory of the sun.

"And his disciples believed on him." Had they not believed hitherto? Yes, but now their faith was strengthened. Faith is a matter of growth and degrees, and it grows through experience and confirmation. Andrew and Peter, John and Philip and Nathanael believed on Jesus down at the Jordan, but now, having seen this miracle, they were sure of him.

The roots of faith struck deeper into their souls.

It is as we see the glory of Jesus shed abroad in the world, ennobling everything it touches, and especially as we experience it in our hearts, that our faith grows trustful and masterful, and we exclaim with our deepest conviction and holiest love, Lord, we believe!

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. Give account of some Jewish wedding customs.
2. Give other instances in which Jesus attended feasts.
3. Have miracles ceased, and why?
4. Give other ways in which Jesus manifests his glory.
5. How can this act of Jesus be reconciled with our temperance views?

LESSON VII.—AUGUST 17

JESUS CLEANSES THE TEMPLE

Reverence and Care for God's House

Golden Text: My house shall be called the house of prayer. Matthew 21:13.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 15

Lesson Material: Matt 21: 12–13; Mark 11: 15–17; Luke 19: 45–46

Lesson Text: John 2:13–22

13 ¶ And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem,
14 And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting:
15 And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables;
16 And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house a house of merchandise.
17 And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.
18 ¶ Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us seeing that thou doest these things?
19 Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.
20 Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?
21 But he spake of the temple of his body.
22 When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus had said.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. Desecration of the House of God.
2. The Indignation of Jesus.
3. The Demand for a Sign.
4. Many Believed.

From Cana Jesus and his disciples went down to Capernaum, which during his ministry in Galilee was his headquarters for something more than a year. The feast of the Passover was near, and presently he with his disciples was in Jerusalem at the first of the four Passovers that occurred during his ministry and serve to divide it conveniently into three periods of one year each.

Jesus attended the feasts as a worshiper, having come to fulfil all righteousness, and also that he might proclaim the kingdom and sow seeds of truth amongst the great multitudes of people, sometimes reaching two millions, that gathered on these occasions.

1. Desecration of the House of God

When he entered the sacred precincts of the temple, he found a terrible desecration of his Father's house. Immense numbers of animals were needed for the feast and offerings, and worshipers bought these in Jerusalem.

This business had invaded the temple.

"The outer court," says Geikie, "known as the Court of the Heathen, was in part covered with pens for sheep, goats and cattle. Sellers shouted the merits of their beasts, sheep bleated, and oxen lowed. It was, in fact, the great yearly fair of Jerusalem, and the crowds added to the din and tumult, till the services in the neighboring courts were sadly disturbed. The rents of the sheep and cattle pens, and the profits on the doves, had led the priests to sanction the incongruity of thus turning the temple itself into a noisy market. Potters pressed on the pilgrims their clay dishes and ovens for the Passover Lamb; hundreds of traders recommended their wares aloud; shops for wine, oil, salt, and all else needed for sacrifices, invited customers. On both sides of the east temple gate stalls had for generations been permitted for changing foreign money. The trade gave ready means for fraud, which was only too common. Five per cent. exchange was charged, for which the class had everywhere earned so bad a name, that like the publicans, their witness would not be taken before a court."

The cattle and merchandise and traffic, the crowds and confusion, the clamorous hawking and haranguing of the noisy Oriental venders, the cheating frauds, were a wicked and intolerable nuisance and desecration in the place of worship.

The house of God is always exposed to this danger.

Church fairs, festivals, and entertainments are apt to develop such tendencies, and great care should be exercised in conducting them.

No associations that jar upon our sense of propriety and reverence should be allowed to gather around the sanctuary.

The church is exposed to the same evil in a more insidious and dangerous way through the intrusion of a worldly spirit into its worship and membership.

When the selfishness and strife and unrighteousness of the world get into a church, it is no more a fit dwelling place for the Holy Spirit and there the Shekinah ceases to shine.

Every believer is a temple of God and should keep himself unspotted from the world.

2. The Indignation of Jesus

Jesus looked on the shocking scene with painful aversion and holy indignation. He was a young man an unknown Galilean, with no express authority to interfere, for the matter was under the supervision of the priests, but there are moments when petty technicalities must give way before some mighty impulse of righteousness.

Jesus felt that this moment had come. Decisive action was the demand of the hour.

The whole thing was broadly illegal and ought to be ended at once. Picking up some cords and tying them together into a whip, he drove the animals out of the temple; then turning upon the money changers, he upset their tables, scattering their coins upon the marble pavement; lastly he ordered the dove dealers to leave with their cages, completing the work with the admonition and justification, "Make not my Father's house a house of merchandise."

The sudden attack created consternation among the unholy traffickers, and the reform was accomplished in a moment.

What is the explanation of this amazing act? Guilty consciences on the one side, and holy earnestness on the other.

These noisy venders knew they were desecrating the temple and they quailed before and slunk away from the lofty personality of Jesus, "the starry light that shone in his eyes and the divine majesty that beamed from his features."

The incident shows the power of one man, who is right, against a multitude who are wrong.

There is no telling what one righteous man can do when he takes a bold stand against the wrong.

The merchandise was right out of the temple, but it was wrong in the temple.

Things are often right or wrong according to time and place.

Jesus was not only gentle with divine tenderness, but he was also inflexible on every point of righteousness and out of him could flash divine wrath.

He was no mere pacifist, but was a true soldier of God. In remembering that he is the Lamb, we should not forget that he is also the Lion.

His zeal for righteousness was costly to Jesus. It consumed his time and strength, it ate him up.

All good work costs.

Jesus comes into our lives that he may cast out all evil; his fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor and gather the wheat into the garner.

3. The Demand for a Sign

The Jews, as soon as they had recovered from their astonishment, began to take note of this unknown reformer. Was he a prophet that he had a right to sweep away ancient customs, which, though unlawful, were yet sanctioned by the priests?

If he were a prophet, he could work some miracle to vindicate his authority.

So they turned upon him with a demand for a sign. Jesus answered, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

This enigmatical answer may have been accompanied with a gesture pointing to his own body, but the Jews understood him to speak of the temple and they were astonished at his audacity.

"He was standing amid the long and lofty arcades of the sacred building; amidst its courts, paved with costliest stones, built up with incredible labor, and equal magnificence, from the valley, hundreds of feet below; its sanctu-

uary ablaze with gold; its wonderful gates of silver and gold and Corinthian brass, which were the national pride. The very existence of the nation was identified with the inviolability of the Temple. The passionate fanaticism for a structure so splendid, and so bound up with the hopes and pride of the nation, was incredible."

It would have been difficult for Jesus to have made a more unpatriotic and unorthodox utterance.

But there are times when it is necessary to shock crass bigotry and corrupt ecclesiasticism with startling statements of truth. Such men as these Pharisees can feel only the thrust of a sword.

How deeply this iron entered into their souls is seen in the fact that this saying was brought up against him at his trial and was coarsely flung as a taunt at him on the cross.

The answer of Jesus had primary reference to the temple of his body. It should be destroyed, but on the third day he would rise again.

His resurrection was the incontestible sign and blazing seal of his divinity. By this act he was declared with power to be the Son of God.

He who could raise his own body from the grave had a right to cleanse the temple from pollution, though sanctioned by the priests; he had authority to forgive sins; and all authority in heaven and on earth was given unto him. The Lord had suddenly come to his temple (Mal. 3:1) to purge it.

The saying of Jesus may also have had reference to the temple itself. The Jews were surely destroying it by their hypocrisies and desecrations. But let it go: Jesus would replace it with a wider and grander worship.

"The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father . . . But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth."

The Father seeketh such to worship him and is not concerned about the time and the place.

The strongest sign and seal we have of Christ's lordship over temple and priest and earth and heaven is his resurrection from the dead.

His disciples "remembered" this saying of his after his resurrection. How large a part of our life has passed into the oblivion of unconsciousness which memory can recall to enrich us again with its treasure of truth and strength!

Often should we stir up our minds by way of remembrance that we may recall to our guidance and inspiration the teachings and memories of forgotten days.

4. Many Believed

As the result of this first work of Jesus in Jerusalem, many believed on his name.

His miracles had persuasive power.

They are not recorded, but we know they were works of wisdom and mercy that showed his healing grace and the love of God. Such works were legitimate proofs of Christ's divinity and Messiahship.

We believe in Christ because we believe in his miracles, but we also believe in his miracles because we believe in Christ. If we are first persuaded of the miracles of Jesus, it is an easy step to his divinity; but if we are first persuaded of his divinity, then it is an easy step to his miracles.

We have the larger and more convincing miracles of the works of Jesus in the world. He stands framed for us in nineteen centuries of Christian history in which he has stamped his image and superscription upon our civilization and has made Christendom stand out as a bright space upon the map of the world. With all the shadows that still rest upon it, this portion of the world bears witness to his personality and presence in unmistakable terms.

With this witness before us we have a broad and deep ground on which to believe the Scripture and the words which Jesus said.

Though Jesus made converts in Jerusalem, yet he was not precipitate in receiving them as his personal disciples. He "did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men."

The people of Jerusalem were of a worldly spirit, seeking an earthly kingdom, and Jesus held aloof from them during his early ministry.

He knew what was in them and he needed not their support and testimony. Christ's kingdom comes not with observation and depends not upon human

wisdom and wealth and pomp and power, and in proportion as the church identifies itself with these agencies, it is shorn of its strength.

Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.

It is a comfort for us to know that Jesus knows what is in man. He can thus control us and overrule his enemies. There is no possibility of deceiving or thwarting Christ.

"The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his."

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. Give some account of the temple as it was in the days of Jesus.
2. What are some ways in which we may desecrate the house of God?
3. How far may we go in the use of force in righting wrongs?
4. Have miracles ceased, and, if so, why?
5. What are our deepest grounds for believing on Jesus?

LESSON VIII.—AUGUST 24

JESUS TALKS WITH NICODEMUS

The New Birth

Golden Text: For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. John 3:16.

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 11: 1–9

Lesson Material: John 7: 45–52,19: 38–42

Lesson Text: John 3:1–17

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:

2 The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?

5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and *of* the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.

8 The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

9 Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be?

10 Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?

11 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness.

12 If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you *of* heavenly things?

13 And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, *even* the Son of man which is in heaven.

14 ¶ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:

15 That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

16 ¶ For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. A Distinguished Night Visitor.

2. A Brusque Reception.

3. A Puzzled Doctor of Divinity.
4. An Authoritative Teacher.
5. The Most Splendid Verse in the Bible.

It is night and Jesus is closeted with one man.

One soul with the great Preacher was a great audience.

Two of his greatest discourses were delivered to solitary hearers, Nicodemus and the woman of Samaria.

Public preaching has its place and power, but the private interview and personal word can never be dispensed with.

This first recorded discourse of Jesus is compact with the great principles and duties of salvation.

Christ's theology was complete from the beginning.

1. A Distinguished Night Visitor

The inquirer who sought this interview is an interesting and attractive character. He was a Pharisee and a rabbi, a member of the Sanhedrin and a man of wealth. He was therefore a man of the highest religious orthodoxy, of unblemished reputation, of profound learning, and of influential social position.

He was one of the foremost men in Jerusalem.

Having seen the miracles of Jesus he came to him by night. The night visit has been used against him as implying timidity or something worse, but this is not a sure inference. There may have been good reasons why it was convenient for him to see Jesus at this time.

Yet it must be admitted that through his whole course Nicodemus at least displayed that discretion which is the better part of valor, and it was not until after the crucifixion that he came out boldly as a follower of Jesus.

The remarkable thing, however, was that this prominent rabbi should visit the obscure Galilean, who had so fearlessly attacked existing institutions, at all.

This in itself was an act of courage and it showed a candid spirit of inquiry after the truth.

This spirit was further manifested in the testimony with which he greeted Jesus. He addressed him as rabbi and declared him to be a teacher come from God.

This shows that he was already profoundly impressed with the mysterious Galilean.

Doubtless his thought was that, as an orthodox Jew and conspicuous rabbi, he was entitled to high consideration and a chief place in the kingdom which Jesus was proclaiming and that all he had to do was to offer himself and be accepted.

And what a splendid convert and powerful accession to the cause of the lowly Nazarene he would have been!

Would not an alliance with such an influential rabbi have in it the promise and potency of speedy success?

The temptations of Jesus did not end in the wilderness, and it may be that this perilous thought pressed against his mind on that memorable night.

2. A Brusque Reception

How did Jesus receive his distinguished visitor?

With the bold and brusque declaration that he must be born again.

He took no notice of his flattering compliment. He paid no deference to his orthodoxy and learning and official position and social standing and made no bid for his support.

He no more relaxed the principles of his kingdom for this scholarly and powerful rabbi than he did for illiterate and profane fishermen.

On the contrary, he insisted on a new birth as the necessary condition of entering the kingdom of God and inflexibly applied this principle to Nicodemus himself.

Nicodemus stood high in the church as a doctor of divinity, he was learned in the Scriptures, no stain was upon his professional robe or private character, but he was not fit for Christ's kingdom.

It is possible to be much, and yet to be nothing: to know the Bible, to sit at the communion table, to stand in the pulpit, and yet not know Christ.

> The man that is highest in the church may be lowest in spiritual life.

This is terrible business, and it is a danger that besets every soul. Outward forms, church membership, the highest respectabilities, unblemished morals, do not make a Christian: only a new heart does this.

> Christ did not come to reform human nature, to gild it and make it appear respectable, but to recreate it into a new creature.
>
> Christ does not want our empty flatteries and may meet them with a brusque rejection.

3. A Puzzled Doctor of Divinity

Nicodemus was puzzled. He ought not to have been, for the Old Testament tells of a new birth, and the rabbis had a saying that a convert was "like a child newborn." Yet Nicodemus, a master in Israel, did not know what Jesus was talking about and revealed his slow apprehension in his question about the new birth as though it were a gross material absurdity.

> Jesus explained that the new birth is one of water and the Spirit. The Spirit is the subjective creative cause of regeneration and the water of baptism is the objective symbolic sign. The inner change is invisible and secret, but expresses itself in fruits that are visible and public.
>
> This was an intimation to Nicodemus that he could not become a secret disciple of Jesus, if he had any such thought.

Jesus now proceeded to throw further light upon this spiritual fact by bringing it into line with natural law. It is only a special case of the universal law that like must come from like.

Flesh begets flesh, and Spirit begets spirit.

This proves the hopelessness of ever developing a saved man out of a lost man by a purely natural process. Higher life may reach down and lift up lower life, but the lower can never of itself press up into the higher.

Only spiritual life can make a spiritual man, and spiritual life comes only from God. This is an eternal law which can no more be broken than gravitation.

The new birth is a mystery in its inner nature, but we need not marvel at it on this account, for our whole life is margined and mingled with mystery. The very wind eludes our observation and soon baffles our profoundest science. We can see its effects, but cannot discern its far-away causes and consequences.

So the new birth manifests itself in outer effects, but hides its inner nature and process.

The same laws run through the natural and spiritual worlds, and things on earth are copies of things in heaven.

Religion is not a mystery peculiar to itself and different from everything else, but it is woven of the universal elements of the world.

Every mystery in religion is paralleled with a like mystery in nature.

We do not get rid of mystery by repudiating religion: the very same mysteries confront us on the sublime face of the universe and are interwoven into all its texture.

Mystery is no bar to action.

We eat of the fruit of the tree, though we cannot follow the dextrous fingers that weave its blossoms and cannot trace the cunning chemistry that ripens its sweets. We walk in the sunlight untroubled by the mysteries of solar physics, and pluck the daisy though it hides from us the infinite secret of life and of God himself.

So we can live the renewed life though we cannot see the renewing Spirit.

Thus Jesus only hinted at the nature of the new birth by illustration and symbol, and what he left a mystery it would be presumption for us to try to explain.

4. An Authoritative Teacher

Still Nicodemus was puzzled. "How can these things be?" was the wondering exclamation that kept escaping from his bewildered mind. Jesus expressed surprise that a teacher of Israel should not know these things.

There are many surprising people in the church, people who with all their Bible reading and church going have not yet grasped some of the simplest and most fundamental principles of the gospel.

They may be keen enough in the things of the world, markets and prices, profits and pleasures, and yet be woefully uninformed and dull-witted in the things of the spirit.

Jesus now proceeded to set forth his authority for these truths. He was not a mere philosopher or theorist spinning out personal opinions and guesses at truth; neither was he teaching knowledge that he had gained at second hand. "We speak," he declared, "that we do know, and testify that we have seen."

Jesus Christ knew what he was talking about.

He had personal knowledge of these things; he was an expert and authority on this subject; he came down from heaven and knew all about it. On all subjects we try to get expert testimony, the best knowledge. To whom shall we go as an authority on character and destiny? Only to the Lord Jesus Christ, for only he has words of eternal life.

Jesus further illustrated his work and kingdom by a figure from the Old Testament Scriptures. The serpent Moses lifted up in the wilderness was a symbol of the Son of Man lifted up on the cross.

In the very beginning of Christ's ministry the cross was lifted up in his teaching. He knew what was coming. He had laid down his life from the foundation of the world. He gave himself that, out of his death, life might come to all that believe in him.

5. The Most Splendid Verse in the Bible

Jesus was now the only speaker. Nicodemus had become silent and sat a rapt listener.

Jesus rose to loftier and ever loftier heights of vision and eloquence.

As he sat with this solitary hearer in the silence of the night he uttered some of his sublimest sayings.

Presently he uttered that saying of his that is the richest and most splendid verse in all the Bible.

It is Luther's "little Bible," which condenses into itself the whole substance and essence of the Bible as to the meaning and the way of salvation.

It sweeps the unbroken horizon and dome of redemption, thickset with stars. It gathers up all the notes of the gospel and strikes them in one rich massive chord. It is full of infinities and eternities. It is ineffably bright with divine love, and yet it is edged with divine wrath. Heaven is in it, and so is hell. Were all the rest of the Bible blotted out, this verse would save us and be the light of the world.

Jesus ended the interview with the practical admonition, "He that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God," and Nicodemus departed.

The gospel of Christ has no secrets that let some men in and keep other men out, but it is all done in the day and its truths and commandments and conditions are alike open and free to all.

It invites us to something that is clear as light and as helpful and saving in its guidance and influence.

"He that doeth truth cometh to the light," said Jesus to the man who came to him by night. Did this night inquirer ever come to the light? Where do we find him next? Defending Jesus before the Sanhedrin. Where do we find him last? At the cross!

And so this night visitor has gathered courage and found his way out of the shadows into the morning where all true seekers shall at last be found.

Let us not, however, put off this meeting with Christ in the morning until it is too late, for the morning cometh and also the night.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. Give some account of the Jewish Sanhedrin to which Nicodemus belonged.
2. Why was Jesus so quick and abrupt in coming to the main point with Nicodemus?
3. How far are we responsible for our ignorance in matters of duty?
4. In what sense did Jesus teach with authority?
5. Bring out more fully the teachings involved in John 3:16.

LESSON IX.—AUGUST 31

JESUS TALKS WITH A SAMARITAN WOMAN

The Teaching of Jesus Concerning Himself

Golden Text: God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. John 4:24.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 25: 1–7

Lesson Material: John 4: 4–42

Lesson Text: John 4:7–14, 24–26, 31–35

7 There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink.
8 (For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.)
9 Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.
10 Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.
11 The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water?
12 Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle?
13 Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again:
14 But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

24 God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth.
25 The woman saith unto him, I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things.
26 Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am *he*.

31 ¶ In the mean while his disciples prayed him, saying, Master, eat.
32 But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of.
33 Therefore said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought him *aught* to eat?
34 Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.
35 Say not ye, There are yet four months, and *then* cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. The Water of Earth.
2. The Water of Heaven.

3. An Inner Well of Living Water.
4. An Unexpected Disclosure.
5. Introducing a Sectarian Dispute.
6. The Messiah Revealed.

Another private interview and another great discourse to an audience of one: this time with a woman.

Nicodemus was a great and good man, but this was a bad woman: Christ is no respecter of persons. Any human soul is worth trying to save. The dull stone may be an uncut diamond.

Jesus had spent most of the first year of his ministry in Judea, and was now on his way up through Samaria to Galilee.

One day at noon, tired and thirsty, he sat down on the stone curb of Jacob's well.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and the well furnished the text and the woman the audience for one of Christ's greatest sermons.

1. The Water of Earth

Jesus opened the conversation with delicate tact by asking the woman for a drink of water. The smallest things in our daily life open an easy way into the great things of the kingdom.

The woman expressed surprise that a Jew would ask a favor of a Samaritan, for they were of different races and religious denominations, and she thought that therefore they should have no dealings with one another. Racial antagonisms and religious prejudices are among the deepest divisive lines in the world, rending the common brotherhood of humanity into warring fragments.

The narrow mind thinks that we should hold aloof from those that differ from us and beware of their most friendly advances.

The woman's question opened a fine opportunity for a controversy, but Jesus passed it by in silence, for this was just what he wanted to avoid. Had he followed up her question, he would simply have stirred up her race preju-

dice and partisan zeal, and that would have ended all hope of doing her any good.

The beginning of religious controversy is usually the end of edification, and therefore we should avoid it as much as possible.

Jesus said nothing directly on the subject on which the woman wanted to talk, and yet he reached it indirectly and in the end closed up the gap. The longest way around is sometimes the surest way there, and in seeking to win others to Christ we must be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.

We can seldom do much towards settling racial antagonisms and religious controversies and social disputes and labor disturbances by attacking them directly this only inflames passion and stirs up strife—but if we can get the spirit of Christ down under them, they will heal and close up.

2. The Water of Heaven

Jesus answered the woman that, if she knew the gift of God, she would ask of him and receive living water.

She was close to a great blessing and did not know it.

There she was seeking the perishable water of the earth, all unconscious of the nearness of the living water of heaven.

Is not this a pathetic picture of the blindness of this world?

How often are great riches or blessings near to us, but our ignorance or earthliness veils them from us! Men are seeking for gold, digging deep into the bowels of the earth or climbing far up on the ice cap of the globe towards the pole, or they spend their days and nights in search of it through business, and yet how often do they fail to see and possess that "gold tried in the fire," the fine gold of God's grace that lies so near in great abundance?

While we are busy running to and fro trying to find some fountain or stream that will quench our worldly thirst, the well of salvation is just at our feet.

Jesus himself was the well of living water to which he referred.

The analogy between Christ and a well is close and beautiful at many points. The well has its origin in the heart of nature. It is not born of the spot of earth where it is found, but has deep roots and distant connections. It is fed by far-away hills and nourished by the clouds. It is born of the sky and brings heaven's life to bless the earth.

So Christ has divine roots and eternal relations. He comes out of the heart of the Infinite, a refreshing stream gushing out of the Rock of Ages that brings to us the life of God.

3. An Inner Well of Living Water

The woman, like Nicodemus, misunderstood him and supposed he was speaking of earthly water. She was surprised and puzzled that a travel-stained Jew, who had himself just asked for a drink, should have living water.

Whence could he have it? Not out of the well, for it was deep and he had nothing to draw with.

Was he greater than Jacob that he could supply better water than that great patriarch had found?

Jesus again parried her question and kept to the end he had in view. He refused to be drawn off into side issues and controversial points.

"Jesus answered and said unto her, whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

The wells of this world furnish water much of which is good and necessary, but it will not quench our spiritual thirst so as to satisfy our souls.

These earthly wells also are subject to all the fickle changes of climate and circumstance. Dry weather may cause them to run low and a drought may turn them into dust. Some dislocation of circumstance may crack them and let all the water escape, or an earthquake may utterly destroy them.

Jesus opens a well of living water within the heart that is careless of the weather and not afraid of a drought.

The man of pure heart and rich character can have peace and comfort anywhere, for he carries his well of satisfaction within him.

The happiest people are not those who have the most comforts outside, but those who have the most comfort inside.

The inner life determines the outer. Every point on the circumference is pulled into its place by the center. All the bloom and fruitage of the tree are the outgrowth of one vital germ.

Position is vastly less important than disposition. The spirit of Jesus abiding in the heart is a well of water ever springing up into pure and sweet life.

4. An Unexpected Disclosure

The woman now began to understand in a dim way that Jesus had better water, and she asked him for it, though still confusing it with earthly water.

Jesus had now reached the point with her where he could not go further without making her conscious of her deepest need.

For this purpose he threw a searchlight into her inner life. "Go, call thy husband," he quietly said.

The woman put on a bold face and said, "I have no husband." Jesus retorted, "Thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband."

This totally unexpected reply struck her like a shot.

She suddenly stood revealed in the blaze of the mysterious Stranger's knowledge; and her instant conclusion was, "Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet."

Christ cannot go far with us until he touches some sore spot in our lives. The probe must precede the cure.

Christ must know all about us in order to heal us. Our secret sins must be brought to light and be cleansed away before his spirit can dwell in us.

5. Introducing a Sectarian Dispute

The conversation was now growing uncomfortably close and searching, and the woman thought it was time to change the subject; besides, she thought she saw a chance to have a fierce denominational dispute between the Samaritans and the Jews decided.

The burning point of this controversy was the true place of worship.

The Jews said Jerusalem was the only divinely appointed place, and the Samaritans made the same claim for Gerizim; and these two mountain tops twenty miles apart were crowned with rival temples, and altar flamed defiance at altar.

"Our fathers worshiped in this mountain," she said; "and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."

Having submitted the point she waited for the prophet's reply, doubtless hoping that her own place of worship would receive a triumphant vindication.

What did Jesus answer? He was himself a Jew, and all his patriotic and religious associations were centered in Jerusalem. Would he not now declare his own holy city to be the only true place of worship and brand the Samaritan temple as heretical and idolatrous?

He did nothing of the kind, but gave an answer that was equally disappointing, revolutionary and tragical to both Jews and Samaritans.

"The hour cometh," he said, "when neither in this mountain, nor yet in Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father."

He delivered the grandest discourse ever uttered on the universality and spirituality of worship. He showed that worship is not a matter of mountains and temples, but of the heart and spirit.

He wiped Jerusalem off the map as an exclusive center of worship and set religion free and diffused it around the world as a universal privilege.

In this answer he refused to take either side in this denominational dispute and swept both sides away with a broader principle.

God has no favorites in the sense that some religionists think.

He is not interested in deciding little denominational controversies, but wants us to get away from them to broad principles. He looks at the worshiper and not at the place of worship.

Worship is not like some rare plant that grows only on some solitary mountain top, but it is like grass that grows all over the world.

If we will lift up our eyes to the grand mountain of worship and see the whole world as a spiritual temple, we shall lose sight of the little divisive ravines lying around our feet. Such worshipers the Father seeks.

6. The Messiah Revealed

The woman now spoke in a more modest and teachable spirit. She felt that she did not know much in the presence of such a prophet, and she expressed a belief that Messiah was coming and that he would tell her troubled heart all things.

Was she already suspecting that the strange Prophet was the Messiah?

Jesus had now led her to the point he had in view. The moment for his self-revelation had come; and with simple dignity he said, "I that speak unto thee am he."

Here is Christ's first and clearest declaration of his Messiahship.

He knew who he was and why he was in the world. There was no self-conscious vanity in this announcement, as it was the truth and it was needful that it should be told. It is not impertinent in the sun to let its light shine.

Jesus revealed himself to the sin-stricken woman on the point of penitence as a physician reveals himself to the sick and wounded. The moment the woman felt her need of light the Sun of Righteousness rose upon her soul. And from his blessed presence she hastened into the city to tell the glad news.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. What was the racial origin of the Samaritans and what was their religion?
2. What was the history of the well of Jacob? Is it there today?
3. In what sense may we have a well of water within us?
4. What would Jesus say today if we could submit some of our denominational disputes to him?
5. What proofs do we have that Jesus is the Messiah of God?

LESSON X.—SEPTEMBER 7

JESUS HEALS A NOBLEMAN'S SON

What Should We Expect from Faith?

Golden Text: I am the way, the truth, and the life. John 14:6.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 130: 1–8

Lesson Material: John 4: 39–54

Lesson Text: John 4:46–54

46 So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum.
47 When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judea into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death.
48 Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe.
49 The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die.
50 Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way.
51 And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told *him*, saying, Thy son liveth.
52 Then inquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.
53 So the father knew that *it was* at the same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed, and his whole house.
54 This *is* again the second miracle *that* Jesus did, when he was come out of Judea into Galilee.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. ***A Prophet Without Honor in His Own Country.***
2. ***Galilee Hears from Jerusalem.***
3. ***A Certain Nobleman.***
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6. ***A Joyful Home.***

After a stop of two days in Sychar, during which many Samaritans believed and there was great joy in that city, Jesus passed on into Galilee.

1. A Prophet Without Honor in His Own Country

The reason Jesus gave for his course at this time was that "a prophet hath no honor in his own country." His own country was Galilee, and in this proverbial saying he appears to have explained why he began his ministry in Judea and not among his own people; he could have gained no hearing in his own region at first, but having won reputation abroad, he could now command some attention at home.

Jesus felt the full force of this proverb when he appeared in his own town.

"Is not this Joseph's son?" was the question with which he was greeted in the synagogue in Nazareth; and later in the same place they exclaimed, "Is not this the carpenter's son?" They thought he could not amount to much because they knew him so well. That young carpenter that had grown up among them and had never done anything remarkable and gave no promise of distinction could never turn out to be any great one.

Men must usually go away from home to win fame: when they return their old friends and neighbors are incredulous and wonder how it came about.

Plenty of people in his home town thought Abraham Lincoln was only a commonplace man, a fellow lawyer even declaring in writing, "He had no mind not possessed by the most ordinary of men." We measure others by ourselves, and it is hard for us to think that one who has grown up among us can be bigger or better than we are.

It is easy for us to applaud personal worth that is far off and be blind to that which is near by.

A congregation may go into raptures over a visiting minister of some reputation and not know that it has a better preacher in its own pastor.

Some people seem to think it is always the proper thing to depreciate their own church and town and home affairs, as though these were beneath them, and are forever praising things in a

distant city or country, as though that were the only place that is good enough for them.

Then why don't they go there? We should have an eye for the good that is near at hand and not dishonor the prophets in our own country.

2. Galilee Hears from Jerusalem

When Jesus came into Galilee "the Galileans received him, having seen all the things that he did at Jerusalem at the feast: for they also went unto the feast." He had wrought a notable miracle in his own country when he turned the water into wine at the wedding at Cana, but this made no abiding impression and brought him no fame.

Galilee welcomed Jesus only after he had made his reputation in Jerusalem. These rustic residents of the provinces did not know what to make of the new prophet until he had upon him the stamp of the metropolis! Jerusalem sets the fashions, and Galilee must have no opinions until it hears from the capital.

The same principle widely rules the world today. The country wants always to hear from the city before making up its mind on many subjects. Many people do not know what books to read until they hear what the critics are saying, or what the crowd is buying and is the "best seller" in the market; many do not know what political opinions to adopt until they hear from their party; some Americans do not know how to speak the English language until they hear how it is pronounced in London; and lots of people do not know what to wear until they see the latest fashion plate from Paris.

Plenty of people choose their church and shape their religious creed and practices on no higher principle than that of current opinion and fashionable popularity.

3. A Certain Nobleman

There was at least one man in Galilee, however, who had a deeper reason for believing on Jesus than any superficial wonder and fame that had been created by his doings up in Jerusalem. This man "was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum."

The nobleman was an officer in the court of Herod Antipas and was therefore a man of wealth and power.

Wealth and power might environ him in marble walls and costly tapestries, but they could not exclude the fever germs that floated in the air and could not protect his boy from their poisonous fangs.

The terrible disease struck the boy down, and anxious faces watched over him while muffled feet slipped through the darkened palace in silence. Passers-by envied the great man up in the marble house, but the owner of that house could not eat or sleep, and the moaning of his darling boy cut him to the heart.

Lives that are outwardly surrounded with wealth and luxury and excite social envy, may inwardly be full of sorrow and bitterness. Trouble is no respecter of persons and marble walls may hide the sharpest anguish or the ghastliest skeletons.

When this nobleman "heard that Jesus was come out of Judea into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son; for he was at the point of death." Some report had reached him of the wonder-working prophet and he resolved to trust that report. He may have had but a slight basis for action, at times doubt may have disturbed or dispelled his trust, but at this time his impetuous need made the most of it and turned a slender fact into a great faith.

A bleeding, crying heart is more than a match for a speculating, doubting brain.

So the nobleman went and besought Jesus, thus turning his faith into fact.

Faith that is standing still, thinking, speculating, doubting, is likely to die in its tracks, but faith that is acting and pressing on to Christ is on the way to triumph.

He "heard" and "went" and "besought," and these three steps are a path that will surely take us to Christ.

4. A Strange Reply

Jesus heard the nobleman's appeal and made a strange reply. "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe."

Was not this a cold reception to give this heart-broken father and distinguished officer who had so faithfully trusted and so pathetically appealed to Jesus?

It must be admitted that Christ's answers even to the sorrowing and penitent were not always what were expected, and they are not always with us what we desire and expect.

Infinite love sees deeper than our sight and often turns our wisdom into foolishness.

Faith that has any substance and vitality in it can stand some rebuff and shock, and may be all the better for it.

This nobleman had heard of miracles, and Jesus would ground his faith on something deeper than these passing wonders. A faith based on these things is good, but there is something vastly better beyond it. Miracles are good as signboards to point us to Christ, but they can never take the place of Christ himself, and our faith must rest, not on them, but on him.

The last and least thing Christ would have us think of him is that he is a mere wonder-worker. He wants us to trust and love him for what he is in himself, and not for the sparks of omnipotence that flashed from his fingers or from the fringe of his garment.

The nobleman faithfully stood the thrust of the probe and was by it only spurred to a more masterful faith and a more earnest cry, "Sir, come down ere my child die." It was a matter of life or death with him, and he would take Jesus at any terms.

If we once come to know our sorrow and our sin as we ought to know them with a deep sense of our need, no question of miracles will come between us and Christ, no speculative doubt will paralyze our faith, but we will cry mightily unto him for healing and life.

5. A Healed Son

Jesus now answered the nobleman with a better word of blessing than he had ever expected. "Go thy way; thy son liveth."

Omniscience and omnipotence flash out of this answer.

Jesus was not limited and obstructed by time and space, as we are. Standing there in Cana he could heal the boy down in Capernaum just as well as though he were by his side.

It puts no strain upon our faith that He by whom all things were made that were made could speak, and simultaneously it was done at a distance.

Are we not now doing things as wonderful as this with our wireless communication and action, even directing airships and torpedoes by shooting wireless waves through the ether?

"Thy son liveth" were the stupendous words, fraught with the making or the unmaking of all his claims, that calmly fell from the lips of Jesus. But even in so speaking he gave the nobleman something to do: "Go thy way."

> Every act of Christ for us involves some corresponding act by us, and so must we ever be coworkers with him in our own healing and blessing.

"And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way."

> The great command was met with great faith and unquestioning obedience.

Have we not a broader basis of fact to believe the words of Jesus than this nobleman had? and are not our needs as great?

> Then let us act upon these words and match his commands with our conduct. We never come to him with a petition that he does not give us some word to believe and some duty to do, and obedience should instantly send us on our way.

6. A Joyful Home

The nobleman started homeward, but seems to have been in no hurry, at least he did not reach home until the next day.

> He knew it was well in the home and had no fear for his boy. When faith accepts the word of Jesus as fact, how many problems are solved, how many burdens roll off the heart!

One trouble with us is that after putting ourselves in the care of God we still keep on trying to run our own affairs and to manage the universe. If we will only commit our ways unto him and then drop into his everlasting Arm we need fear no further evil.

As the nobleman drew near his home his servants met him with the announcement that the boy was better. The father inquired the hour when the change took place, and when he was told that it was the seventh hour, or one o'clock of the day before, he knew that this was the very hour that Jesus had spoken.

God is always on time in his physical heavens in which no star is ever a second late, and he is equally prompt on the schedule of his promises to his children.

Again the palace windows were thrown open to the sunshine and music floated through the halls.

The healing of the seamless robe of Christ always brings joy into the heart and home, and when the home is happy how it irradiates its joy into all things around it.

This is what one man's faith did for his home, and faith can still work the same joyous change in our homes.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. Give instances in which famous men had little honor in their own towns.
2. Are there good reasons why the country should be influenced in its opinions and fashions by the city?
3. Are there any disadvantages in being rich?
4. Give other instances in which Jesus was slow to answer to earnest requests.
5. What should we do when answers to our prayers are delayed?

LESSON XI.—SEPTEMBER 14

JESUS DRIVEN FROM NAZARETH

The Mission of Christianity

Golden Text: He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. Luke 4:18.

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 61:1-3, 10:11.

Lesson Material: Luke 4:16-44.

Lesson Text: Luke 4:16–30

16 ¶ And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read.

17 And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written,

18 The Spirit of the Lord *is* upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,

19 To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

20 And he closed the book, and he gave *it* again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him.

21 And he began to say unto them, This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears.

22 And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?

23 And he said unto them, Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country.

24 And he said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country.

25 But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land;

26 But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, *a city* of Sidon, unto a woman *that was* a widow.

27 And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.

28 And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath,

29 And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong.

30 But he, passing through the midst of them, went his way,

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. *Jesus in His Home Church at Nazareth.*
2. *His Text and Sermon.*

3. The Reception of the Sermon.
4. Jesus Driven out of His Own Town.

The first year of Christ's ministry having been spent in Judea, the next year and a half were passed mainly in Galilee with his headquarters at Capernaum.

One of the first places he visited was Nazareth, his own home, where he had been brought up and had lived for nearly thirty years and was familiarly known as a carpenter of the town.

Only about a year before he had closed his shop and gone south into Judea, whence marvelous stories floated back on the tide of returning pilgrims of his cleansing the temple and working miracles and appearing as the Messiah. His arrival in his own village would set all tongues gossiping and create a tremendous sensation in the sleepy old town.

Here Jesus opened his public ministry in the north and was quickly driven away, so that in the most literal sense "he came unto his own, and his own received him not."

1. Jesus in His Home Church at Nazareth

Nazareth was a specially difficult place for him to be in. He had gone away a carpenter, and he had come back a prophet. He was to preach his first sermon in the village synagogue in which he had worshiped from childhood. The people had known him from boyhood and he knew them. As he stood before them he looked into the faces of his friends and neighbors and former companions, of his mother and brothers.

We may suppose that he rose with the usual embarrassment of a young minister rising to preach his first sermon in his home church before his relatives and friends. Doubtless Mary had a mother's pride in her son.

Jesus felt the delicacy and knew the danger of the situation, but he began his ministry at home, where every one's duty begins.

"As his custom was, he entered into the synagogue on the Sabbath day." It is instructive to notice how Jesus spent this Sabbath.

He did not spend it in lounging about, or in pleasure seeking, or in talking politics or business, but he went to church.

He went "as his custom was," according to habit.

He did not consult his feelings, or look over his wardrobe, or consider the state of the weather, but he simply went as the regular and right thing to do.

There are some things that to be done well must be done habitually.

A scholar would not get along well who would debate with himself every morning whether or not he would go to school that day, or a business man whether or not he would open his store or bank.

Neither should we debate whether or not we shall go to the church. The almanac should decide this question for us.

We should go to church according to the calendar and the clock: not according to our wardrobe and the weather.

Jesus went to the synagogue though there were there some things that were not agreeable to him. There were people there who did not like him and were watching a chance to do him harm.

And the preaching did not suit him at all. It was intolerably dry and unprofitable. The whole service was formal and lifeless and uncongenial to a true worshiper.

The Jewish synagogue at this time was a poor church.

One would have thought that Jesus would have stayed away from it and have had nothing to do with it. But "as his custom was, he entered into the synagogue."

He did not insist on having an ideal church and minister or none, but he took things as they were and made the best of them.

We should not be too sensitive and critical about the synagogue we attend.

No doubt there are things in our church we would have different. There may be people there that we do not like and that do not like us. The preaching may not suit us, and the prayer meeting may seem to us hopelessly dull and wearisome.

But if on account of these things we stay away from the church, we cannot quote in sanction of our course the example of Jesus Christ.

Jesus not only went to church, but he "stood up for to read," he took part in the service. He was not simply a passive listener, absorbing like a sponge, but he was an active participant, giving forth like a fountain. The service in our church may be poor simply because we take from it and contribute nothing to it. Every one should have an active part in the praise or prayer or instruction.

The church is not a place for rest, its cushions are not couches, much less is it a place for criticism, but it is a place of activity; its worship is working.

2. His Text and Sermon

Jesus chose his first text from the prophet Isaiah. Having read the passage, stopping the quotation at a significant point (Isaiah 61:1-2), he handed the roll of the Scripture back to the minister and sat down, according to the custom, to speak.

All eyes were fixed upon him, and a breathless hush fell upon the congregation.

Only a single sentence of the sermon is recorded, its introductory words, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears."

This introduction is short and goes straight to the mark.

It is not one of those long prosy introductions that give one that tired feeling before any point is reached, but it leaps right into the heart of the subject. It illuminates the text with a flash of light, it gives an ancient Scripture a modern application; and it puts Jesus himself in the focus of the Old Testament and converges all its rays upon him as their burning center.

We could wish more of this sermon had been preserved, but we are fortunate in having its text, for it is one of the richest Messianic passages in the Bible, striking all the chords of Christ's ministry and full of the music of the gospel.

Each of its clauses is deeply significant. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me": Jesus did not hesitate to appropriate this description to himself; the Spirit that was given to the prophets in limited measure and fragmentary gifts was given to him in boundless fulness.

"Because he hath anointed me to preach": the meaning is that Christ is set apart as one who is qualified for the work of salvation.

The teacher must have his certificate and the physician his diploma. We will not trust any raw hand to hold the lever of the midnight express. Men must be set apart and trained for skilled service.

What certificate of qualification does Christ have for his tremendous mission and work? "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach."

He is not rushing blindly into a work which he does not understand, but he is the highest authority and supreme expert on salvation.

In committing ourselves to him we are not trusting an experimenter who comes to try his untrained hand at the business of saving us, but we are committing ourselves to him who has all power in heaven and on earth.

"To preach the gospel to the poor": this is one of the glories of the gospel. Jesus himself, in answer to John the Baptist in which he massed together the proofs of his Messiahship (Matt. 11:2-6), put his preaching to the poor last as the strongest piece and climax of evidence.

This was a brighter jewel in his crown than his raising the dead. Jesus allowed the rich young ruler to go off, but he bound the blind beggar to himself.

When the gospel gets out of sympathy with the poor, it will have forgotten its mission and lost its power.

"To preach deliverance to the captives": deliverance was a glad word to the Jews, for they were in bondage to the hated Roman. The gospel means civil liberty, but it means more. The deepest bondage is not without, but within. Fetters bind the body, but sin binds the soul. The worst master we can have over us is an evil disposition within us. A man is not free until he is free in his heart.

Glorious freedom is freedom from sin and wide unobstructed liberty to live the life of God.

"And recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised": the world was then full of blind and bruised people, and they instinctively crowded around Jesus.

At times he had to pick his steps on account of the sick and afflicted that were laid in his path. The moan of suffering and sorrow ever smote upon his ear. His ministry was a path of mercy, bright and beneficent as a sunbeam.

The world is still burdened with the blind and the bruised. Out over this human sea of sorrow floats the voice of him whose immortal words have lost none of their music and healing balm.

All these points of light in the text poured their splendor on the day of Christ's coming and made it "the acceptable year of the Lord."

With such a text, the sermon must have been one of extraordinary richness and power and have rivalled the Sermon on the Mount.

3. The Reception of the Sermon

How was the sermon received? "All bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth."

This promised well for the congregation, showing that it was an attentive audience.

A good sermon depends almost as much upon good hearing as upon good preaching.

No doubt there is plenty of poor preaching up in the pulpit, but perhaps one reason for it is the discouragingly poor attention down in the pews.

Yet there is something suspicious in the word "wondered." It suggests mere admiration for rhetoric and elocution, interest in the manner rather than in the matter of the discourse.

One of the most barren results of preaching is for the people to go out wondering at the sermon rather than worshiping Christ.

The next suspicious point in the reception of the sermon is criticism of the preacher. "Is not this Joseph's son?"

Appreciation quickly turned to depreciation.

They began to judge the preacher by his parentage; they compared his profession of Messiahship with his family pedigree and said the two did not match. Because they knew him so well they thought he could not amount to anything. A carpenter's son could never be a prophet.

But it was and is the glory of Jesus that he was a carpenter. It is always easier to criticize the preacher than to practice the sermon.

4. Jesus Driven Out of His Own Town

The next point in the reception of the sermon was an unreasonable demand upon the preacher from the people. They demanded miracles merely for their gratification, and perhaps that they might be honored equally with or above rival towns.

Jesus could not yield to such a demand, and proceeded to show them that if they would not receive the truth God would send it elsewhere, even to Gentiles and leprous heathen.

This was too much for their bigotry and pride, and suddenly the worshiping and wondering congregation became an infuriated mob that seized the preacher and hurried him off to a cliff that they might hurl him down to death.

If we do not like the preaching, let us fly mad at the preacher. If the divine message strikes our pride, let us strike back at the human messenger. If we cannot throw him down a cliff, perhaps we can throw him out of his pulpit; and if we cannot break his head, we can at least break his heart.

Still the matter is not so easily ended. We may kill the messenger, but we cannot kill the message. Truth is immortal, and after we think we have slain it, it still lives to confront us.

Silencing man does not silence God.

And even the persecuted messenger shall not be forgotten of heaven, for Jesus, protected by his own majesty from the murderous mob, " passing through the midst of them, went his way."

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. On what other occasion did Jesus during his ministry visit Nazareth?
2. Why should we go to church?
3. How may we engage in the service in the church?
4. How can we overcome the disposition simply to criticize the sermon and the preacher?
5. What should we do after the sermon and the service?

LESSON XII.—SEPTEMBER 21

JESUS MAKES A MISSIONARY TOUR

Medical Missions

Golden Text: Thou canst make me clean. Mark 1:40.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 65: 1–7.

Lesson Material: Matt 8: 1–4; Luke 5: 12–16.

Lesson Text: Mark 1:35–45

31 And he came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up; and immediately the fever left her, and she ministered unto them.
32 And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils.
33 And all the city was gathered together at the door.
34 And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him.
35 And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.
36 And Simon and they that were with him followed after him.
37 And when they had found him, they said unto him, All *men* seek for thee.
38 And he said unto them, Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth.
39 And he preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and cast out devils.
40 And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.
41 And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth *his* hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean.
42 And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed.
43 And he straitly charged him, and forthwith sent him away;
44 And saith unto him, See thou say nothing to any man: but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing those things which Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.
45 But he went out, and began to publish *it* much, and to blaze abroad the matter, insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. From Worship to Work.
2. A Sunset Scene.
3. Retirement into Solitude.
4. The Next Towns.
5. Healing in the Synagogue.

From Nazareth Jesus moved down to Capernaum which now became his head quarters where he entered upon the work of teaching and healing and from which he went out on various preaching tours through the populous district around lake Galilee. We again study a Sabbath day in his life.

1. From Worship to Work

On the morning of this Sabbath, as on the Sabbath morning in Nazareth, Jesus went to church in the synagogue, where he healed a man possessed of an evil spirit.

What did he do at the close of the service? "And forthwith, when they were come out of the synagogue, they entered into the home of Simon and Andrew, with James and John."

What did Jesus do in this home? Just the same kind of work he did in the synagogue: he healed Simon's wife's mother of a fever; he blessed that home.

We do not see much of the home life of Jesus; in truth he had no home, nor where to lay his head. But when we do find him in a home we always see it made better by his presence: a sin is forgiven, a dying child is healed, or a dead brother is raised to life.

Christ's religion was not something that he left in the synagogue, but it was his holy, healing presence and power that went with him wherever he went, radiating its beneficent virtue.

There is a close connection between the church and the home.

However many miles may be between them, they touch each other in their inner spirit. What we are in the one, we are in the other.

Worship cannot be shut up in the church, but it must go out with us and renew itself in work. Worship and work are only two sides or aspects of the same spirit.

Religion is preached in the church, but it must be practiced everywhere, especially in the home. The close of worship should be the beginning of work. "Is it all done?" asked a man, coming up to the door of a church at the close of a service. "No," was the answer, "it is all said, and now is the time to do it."

If we get any good in the church, it ought to show itself speedily in the home.

Some sick one should be ministered to with a kinder hand, more patience and gentleness should mark our behavior, beautiful courtesies should be more abundant, new Christlike graces should bloom out in our lives.

The home should be brighter and sweeter on Monday morning and through all the week because we have worshiped on the Sabbath in the church.

2. A Sunset Scene

This Sabbath day closed with a wonderful scene. The city gathered at the door of Simon's house, and the sick were brought until they filled the street, and Jesus healed them and cast out devils.

His mercy, that in the morning manifested itself in the synagogue and in the afternoon filled the home, in the evening overflowed into the street and spread through the city.

The stream of beneficence once started did not stay its flood until the whole city had been bathed in its healing tide.

The love of God is expansive and has in it a wideness like the wideness of the sea.

There is no danger of its stream ever running dry, and it will reach the greatest sinner and the last lost child.

Our religion, having flowed out of the church into the home, must not be confined there, but must overflow into the street and send its cleansing current throughout the whole city.

Having worshiped God in the church, we should go everywhere touching men with healing hands.

Such was this eventful Sabbath in the life of Jesus, and it is a pattern in spirit for the way in which we should spend this day.

3. Retirement into Solitude

Jesus could not stand this incessant work and strenuous life without relief and rest, but he took his rest in a peculiar way. "And in the morning,

rising up a great while before day, he went out into a solitary place, and there prayed."

He sought change of scene by seeking solitude that he might engage in meditation and prayer.

Without this renewal of his own inner life by immersing his soul in silence and communion, his spiritual energies would be exhausted and run dry. He must fill his own soul that he might fill others.

Meditation is necessary to the mastery of life. We must live our lives inwardly in thought before we can live them outwardly in action.

The architect thinks his building through from foundation to finish, he puts it all up in his brain before he creates it in stone and steel; and such inner preparation must always precede outer execution.

The outer action may be brief and appear sudden, but the inner preparation has been long and patient. The harvest may be gathered in an hour, but through how many weeks and months did the wheat silently drink in the showers and the sunshine before it ripened into golden grain. The meteor burns itself out in the twinkling of an eye, but through how many millions of invisible miles did it gather momentum for that brief flash of splendor.

A great surgeon said that if he had only three minutes for a critical operation he would take two to get ready.

Jesus took thirty years of preparation for three years of work.

If we would be architects and artists in living we must take time to get ready, grow deep roots of wisdom and strength in meditation and prayer, and then we may throw our branches out and bear ripened fruit in the world.

In our hurried life we are losing this fine art and deep means of enrichment.

Some people are always craving a crowd and itching for a new thrill of excitement. Left alone they are instantly discontented and miserable.

Other minds are so amply stored with mental and spiritual treasures that they are their own kingdom and may be richer than Crœsus in inner wealth.

Often we need to retire into solitude and put a finger on our spiritual pulse and look ourselves in the face and see what manner of persons we are.

By soaking our souls in meditation and prayer and communion with God, we shall gather strength to do the work and bear the burdens and fight the battle of life. In such solitude we feed on bread that the world knows not of.

4. The Next Towns

Presently the disciples found Jesus in his retreat and summoned him to service with the announcement, "All men seek for thee."

Jesus was now supplying something for which the human heart hungered, and this announcement was prophetic of the great yearning of humanity by which it consciously or unconsciously seeks him.

However, it would not do for Jesus to confine his ministry to one town, and so he proposed, "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth."

This is the principle of home missions and foreign missions.

Why did Jesus not just settle down and stay in Capernaum? That lake port and fishing town was not all converted to his gospel and cleansed and healed. He had scarcely touched the fringe of its disease and wickedness and there was there for him a lifetime of work. Why move on to "the next towns?"

This is precisely the argument of those who are opposed to home missions and especially to foreign missions. We have Christian work enough to do in our town: let us save it before we give our money to the saving of other towns; and besides, ought they not to look after themselves?

This argument becomes still more insistent when it comes to foreign missions, and frequently ridicule is poured upon the visionary scheme of sending missionaries and money to foreign lands when we have so much heathenism at home.

The same principle is made to do service in seeking first the safety and prosperity of our own country and holding aloof from means of helping to bear the burdens and dangers of other countries.

What is the matter with this argument and spirit? Does it not look reasonable enough?

It may be made to look reasonable according to worldly standards, but it is selfish and is thereby opposed to the very spirit of Christ and his gospel.

We cannot completely evangelize one town before we go into the next towns because all towns are tied together in their interests and life, and the spiritual condition of one necessarily affects the condition of others.

Business understands this point and knows that one town cannot permanently prosper with other towns in financial depression, and one country cannot prosper on the poverty and ruin of other countries.

Even in financial matters we must all go up or down together in the long run. Much more so is it in spiritual matters.

If the people of one town resolved that they would completely evangelize their own town before they would help evangelize other towns, they would thereby doom themselves to remain spiritually crippled and withered: their very plan would be selfish and would thereby defeat itself. The last state of such a town might be worse than the first.

On the other hand, let a town begin to think about the welfare of "the next towns," and its own welfare will be promoted thereby; its unselfish spirit of helping other towns will help its own town and hasten its own evangelization.

So also foreign missions react helpfully on home missions. The question is not so much whether the heathen can be saved without us, but whether we can be saved without helping to save the heathen.

In the spiritual world it is more blessed to give than to receive, and this spirit will send us with the gospel that has saved us into the next towns and into other countries that we may help to spread it through the whole world.

So "Jesus preached throughout all Galilee," and so must we go with his gospel even unto the ends of the earth.

5. A Leper Healed

We are given an instance of his healing on this tour. The case is that of one of the most dreadful of human maladies. Leprosy in its contagiousness, repulsiveness and incurability make it the terror of countries where it prevails.

It is an intensely realistic and frightful symbol of sin, showing outwardly in rotting limbs what sin does inwardly to the soul.

This poor fellow came to Jesus, of whom he must have heard, and worshiped him in faith, saying, "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean."

Jesus "put forth his hand, and touched him," itself an act from which any one else would have shrunk with horror.

Then came the mighty word of healing. Only divine power could work such a cure, and the same power can cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Jesus directed the cleansed leper to tell no man, but go and shew himself to the priest, so as to get from him a certificate of his cleansed condition according to the law (Leviticus 13-14), and to offer the gift Moses commanded.

Jesus obeyed the law in all points, and therein set us an example.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. How may we more closely connect the church with the home and business and all our life?
2. Why are we so indisposed to solitary meditation and private prayer?
3. What is your church doing for home and foreign missions?
4. Draw out more fully the reflex benefits of missions.
5. Are there leprous people among us?

LESSON XIII.—SEPTEMBER 28

REVIEW: OPENING PERIOD OF CHRIST'S MINISTRY

The Opening Period of Christ's Ministry

Golden Text: For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. John 3:16.

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 55:1–13.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. *Birth and Boyhood.*
2. *Baptism and Temptation.*
3. *First Events of the Ministry in Judea.*
4. *Two Great Discourses to Audiences of One.*
5. *Opening of the Ministry in Galilee.*

The lessons of this Quarter extend from the birth of Jesus to about the middle of his ministry in Galilee and in addition to his silent years comprise about one half of his public life.

1. Birth and Boyhood

The birth of Jesus is unmatched by the story of any other birth that ever happened in this world.

There is a charm about it and a significance in it that make it the center of the world's thought and gladness at its annual recurrence as it sends waves of joy around the earth.

Angels came to announce it, and strange as were the messengers not less strange was the place to which they came and the persons to whom they told their news. It was a sheep pasture over which they pitched their tents as a gallery in the sky from which they sang the song that is yet echoing through the world.

Not priests and church dignitaries up in Jerusalem but shepherds first heard the story, for God usually must tell new truth

to humble souls whose minds are not obstructed with their own prepossessions.

The place where the Babe would be found was designated and it would be "wrapped in swaddling clothes," a beautiful human touch that brings the wondrous Child near to every home and heart.

The shepherds were quick to obey directions and found the Babe, and that humble manger is now the joy and glory of Christian faith.

The boyhood of Jesus matched his birth in wonder and beauty. He was a genuine human boy and not old beyond his years and morbidly pious.

He grew in wisdom as he grew in years in the home and school and synagogue, in his father's carpenter shop and in play with the boys on the streets of Nazareth.

His attendance at the feast in Jerusalem at the age of twelve years is the only recorded event of his youth, but it was deeply significant. He naturally gravitated to the temple as his "Father's house," and there he was found in the company of rabbis hearing them and asking them questions. He was eager to know more of his Father's ways and will and was thus fitting himself for his public ministry.

Youth is the golden period of preparation for life, and the finest example of such preparation is Jesus himself.

2. Baptism and Temptation

Out of the silence of Nazareth Jesus emerged and appeared down in the Jordan valley where John the Baptist was holding a great revival meeting and baptizing his converts.

John was a fiery preacher uttering calls to repentance and predicting that One would come who would wield an axe and fire to cut down and burn up the old religion to make way for the new.

Jesus requested that he might receive the ordinance of baptism, and John hesitated, declaring that he himself needed such a rite at the hands of Jesus, but Jesus insisted and received the ordinance.

Baptism as applied to Jesus did not signify cleansing from sin but consecration to the service of God, and he accepted it as fulfilling all righteousness.

For us it means both cleansing and consecration, and we should accept it as a sign of our entrance into and loyalty to the kingdom of God.

As Jesus came up out of the water of baptism a wonderful thing happened. The heavens opened and the Spirit descended as a dove and rested on him and a voice declared, "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

And so this humble act of obedience unexpectedly blossomed into this wonderful blessing, and we never know when we enter upon a path of duty what undreamed of good we may find at its end.

The temptation of Jesus immediately followed the baptism, showing what sudden changes may take place in the weather of the spiritual world.

It often seems that when we are enjoying spiritual exaltation we are specially exposed to evil suggestions.

Jesus was led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted: God may lead us into temptation, but we are never to hunt the devil ourselves.

The general meaning of the temptation was that Jesus had now come into the clear consciousness of his divine power, and the perilous problem before him was whether he would use this power for his own gratification and glory, or only in the service and for the glory of God.

Satan attacked Jesus with three suggestions each one of which involved his use of his power for a personal and selfish end.

He was tempted to make bread out of stones, thereby forsaking the appointed way of obtaining food and resorting to his own way; to leap from the temple and gain popular applause by a spectacular performance and thereby get himself accepted as the Messiah; and to worship Satan and thereby get the whole world at a word, a perfectly false and futile way of obtaining the kingdom.

All these temptations were beaten back by a written word of Scripture, and the devil, defeated at every point, fled into the darkness whence he came.

3. First Events of the Ministry in Judea

After the temptation Jesus returned to the Jordan, and there he called his first disciples. John the Baptist pointed to him as the Lamb of God, and two of John's own disciples turned and followed Jesus. "Come and see," was the invitation that Jesus gave to Andrew and John, and this is still the fair proposal he makes to all inquirers.

He would have us come and make trial of his teaching and friendship and then judge for ourselves as to whether he is rightly our Lord and Saviour.

These first disciples were convinced on the ground of their own experience, and then they went and gained two others, each winning his own brother to Jesus.

Christians are Christ thus multiplied and continued, and by this process Christianity has spread and is spreading over the world.

The next day Jesus started for Galilee and fell in with Philip and said to him, "Follow me." The kingdom was still growing. Presently Philip found Nathanael, who was sceptical as to whether any good could come out of Nazareth, but personal experience soon convinced him.

The winning of these first disciples was followed by the first miracle of turning water into wine at the wedding at Cana in Galilee. The failure of the wine at the feast gave Jesus an opportunity to supply a human need and at the same time show forth his glory, a double purpose that all his miracles fulfilled.

They were never wrought as mere wonders for sensational effect, but always for some human good as well as for his divine manifestation.

This miracle was peculiarly significant, for as Moses turned water into blood which symbolized the old dispensation of law, so Jesus in turning water into wine set forth the superior blessing and glory of the new dispensation of grace.

The journey at this time to Galilee was only a temporary visit, and next we find Jesus in Jerusalem cleansing the temple.

The holy house of worship had been desecrated by being turned into a noisy market for hawking goods to be sold and money to be exchanged, and Jesus looked upon the scene with pained displeasure.

> He made a whip and drove out the cattle and upset the tables of the money changers, a righteous exhibition of anger and a use of force that shows that Jesus was not a pure pacifist who would never lift his hand to right a wrong.

The people demanded a miracle as proof of his right to do such things, but he would work no miracle for people in their unbelieving and hostile state of mind, yet he gained many disciples from humbler souls.

4. Two Great Discourses to Audiences of One

Wonder will never cease that Jesus delivered two of his greatest discourses to audiences of a single hearer.

> One soul with him was a great audience, whereas we think we must have a crowd before we can do anything worth while.

Nicodemus was a great and a good man, but he was not fit to enter the kingdom of heaven.

> He came to Jesus with a fine compliment for the young Galilean, but he received a brusque reception and bold demand for a new heart.

The master in Israel was surprised at such a demand, but there are many people in the church who surprise us with their misunderstanding and ignorance of spiritual things.

> Jesus led his night visitor into deeper truths until the rabbi sat a silent and rapt listener, and then Jesus uttered the most splendid verse in the Bible, a golden utterance that comprises the whole sky of redemption thickset with stars, affording us light that will lead us into life.

Even more amazing was the great discourse with the solitary woman of Samaria, for she was not only a woman but a disreputable one at that, yet

Jesus talked with her and delivered a powerful and splendid discourse on the spirituality of worship.

It seemed like wasting grand truth and eloquence on an unworthy and barren soul, but Jesus sowed seed that day that is still blooming on every shore around the world.

5. Opening of the Ministry in Judea

The ministry in Judea started opposition that resulted in the imprisonment of John the Baptist, and Jesus withdrew to Galilee to carry on his work in a less dangerous field, not because he lacked courage but because he possessed prudence.

His entrance into the province was marked by his healing of a nobleman's son, a beautiful instance of faith on the part of a civil or military officer and of sympathy and divine power on the part of Jesus.

He then opened his public preaching in his home synagogue in Nazareth where he chose a specially rich Messianic text and preached a sermon that made all the hearers wonder at his gracious words.

Yet their wonder was not very deep and serious, for it soon turned to criticism and then to hostility and they tried to wreak their hatred of the sermon upon the preacher by attempting to throw him down a cliff.

When we do not like the preaching it is easy for us to turn upon the preacher, and if we cannot throw him down a cliff we may throw him out of his pulpit.

Jesus then made his headquarters in Capernaum where he remained about a year and a half. He went into the synagogue and healed a man on the Sabbath and then straightway went out of the church into a home and healed a sick inmate and then out upon the street and healed a multitude that had assembled out of the city.

He retired for rest and renewal of his strength in meditation and prayer, and then set out upon a tour of " the next towns," for the

gospel is ever expansive and cannot be shut up within one town or country but has in it a wideness that cannot be limited until it has reached the farthest shore and saved the last child.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. Give brief accounts of the birth and of the boyhood of Jesus.
2. State the principal events connected with the baptism and the temptation of Jesus.
3. Name the chief events of the ministry in Judea.
4. Give the points in the discourses to Nicodemus and the woman of Samaria.
5. Give an outline of the order and the significance of all the events in the Life of Jesus in this Quarter.

INTRODUCTION TO FOURTH QUARTER

In the Fourth Quarter the ministry of Jesus reaches and passes its high tide of popularity in Galilee and begins its descent in Jerusalem and Perea through increasing opposition and hostility down to the cross.

We witness the choosing of the Twelve, hear the Sermon on the Mount and the Parable of the Sower, see Jesus standing on the deck of a fishing boat, master of a storm on Lake Galilee, listen to the great parable of the Prodigal Son, are present at the Feeding of the Five Thousand, hear Peter's great confession, gaze upon Jesus as he grows white with splendor on the Mount of Transfiguration, are taught who is our neighbor in the parable of the Good Samaritan, see the man born blind have his eyes opened, are present at the grave of Lazarus when the mighty voice of Jesus burst its bars, and hear the call of the Saviour as he bids Zacchæus to come down out of the tree for he is going home with him.

These are mountain summits and high lights in the central period of the ministry of Jesus, and it is a rare privilege to stand on these summits and witness these great scenes and hear these great teachings.

The story loses nothing by reason of its oft repetition and growing familiarity, but rather gains in interest and fascination as we see deeper into its wonderful meaning.

We are to study it and meditate upon it not only because of its historic interest, but chiefly in order that we may absorb and assimilate its truth and grace into our own souls that they may reappear in the strength and fruitfulness and beauty of our lives.

These words have the wonderful power of recreating in our minds and hearts the thoughts and spirit of Jesus, and thus to know him is to have life more abundant, stronger and richer and everlasting.

To receive such truth is a great privilege and to teach it is a privilege greater still.

FOURTH QUARTER

The Life of Jesus (Harmony of the Gospels)

II. Central Period of Christ's Ministry

(Second Quarter of a Nine Months' Course)

LESSON I.—OCTOBER 5

THE CHOICE OF THE TWELVE

Urgent Need for Full-time Christian Workers

Golden Text: Freely ye have received, freely give. Matthew 10:8.

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 40:1–8.

Lesson Material: Matt. 10:1–44; Mark 3:13–19; Luke 6:12–19.

Lesson Text: Matthew 10:1–8

And when he had called unto *him* his twelve disciples, he gave them power *against* unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.
2 Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James *the son* of Zebedee, and John his brother;
3 Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James *the son* of Alpheus, and Lebbeus, whose surname was Thaddeus;
4 Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.
5 These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into *any* city of the Samaritans enter ye not:
6 But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.
7 And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.
8 Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. The Twelve Disciples.
2. Sent Forth.
3. Their Message.
4. Their Compensation.

The work of Jesus was not growing and spreading, and it was necessary to use wider means in accomplishing it.

A tour through Galilee revealed the needs of the field. When Jesus "saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd" (v. 35).

He did not look upon them with cool, critical indifference, or upbraid them for their condition, but his heart was touched with the feeling of their infirmities, and their sufferings became his sorrow.

"The harvest truly is plenteous," he said, "but the laborers are few." Is it not so still? Even in Christian lands the number of active workers in the cause of Christ is pitifully small compared with the work that is waiting to be done; and when we look out over the wide field of the world and see what a boundless harvest it is, in many places ripe for the reaper, how pathetically few are they that are gathering it!

Jesus, however, did not let all his compassionate feeling escape in this exclamation: he turned it into the channel of action and made it achieve something substantial.

It is easy to feel a fine frenzy of emotion over the condition of the multitude, but if this simply wastes away in tears and evaporates into air, it has no virtue.

Compassion that does not become conduct does others no good and does us harm.

The first action of Jesus was a call for prayer unto the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers. Prayer should be our first step in every enterprise. It sends us to the source of all wisdom and power and puts us on the track of efficient means and successful attainment.

Having prayed to the Lord for laborers, Jesus immediately furnished them himself. His own disciples were not to be saved from this service, but they were saved for this service.

1. The Twelve Disciples

A list of the disciples is given, and we scrutinize the names with interest. By arranging them in groups of four names each, it is easy to carry them in memory.

Peter always comes first, and Judas last. There are two and possibly three pairs of brothers among them.

This is probably the most important list of names in the world.

These men were given a work compared with which winning battles and founding empires are of small consequence. They were to let loose a force that was to undermine all empires and shape all future ages.

Yet they were not great men, and there was not a man of genius among them. They were plain men unlearned in philosophy. Not one of them belonged to the priestly or professional class. None was of noble birth, but all were obscure and mostly poor. At least four of them were fishermen and some of them were expert in profanity. One of them was a despised tax collector, and one was a zealot, a kind of anarchist of the day.

Jerusalem, the chosen city of God and proud university city and capital of the country, the metropolis where were the aristocracy and scholars and hierarchy and temple, was not permitted to put one name in this immortal list.

One always has attached to his name the dark stigma, "which also betrayed him."

Verily not many wise, not many noble, not many mighty, were called, but God chose the foolish to confound the wise, and the weak to confound the mighty.

Yet these men so poorly gifted and unlearned and weak in themselves could do mighty things and shape and reshape the world through Christ who strengthened them. The very simplicity of these men, unspoiled by human philosophy, made them unobstructed channels through which the grace of Christ could flow in resistless might.

The spirit of Jesus touched and transformed their souls with eternal issues and made them great.

Often has God, in choosing men for great visions and victories,

passed by the noble and rich and learned and found humble souls born in obscurity and breathed into them his spirit and told them first the message he sent them to tell the world.

2. Sent Forth

The disciples were sent forth. They were with Jesus not that they might stay with him, but that they might receive his gospel and then carry it unto others.

Their spiritual training was not yet complete, they were in the theological seminary, but they were given some preaching to do. The apprentice must be allowed to try his hand at the work, or he will never learn how.

We are not to wait until we are complete in Christian wisdom and experience before we begin to work for Christ, but we are to begin with such preparation as we have and let wisdom and work grow together.

Their field of work was strictly defined: not the Gentiles, or Samaritans, but only the house of Israel. This may seem strange as being at variance with the worldwide mission of the gospel, and yet it is divine wisdom and common sense.

The propagation of any principle must begin at home and work outward. There must be a base of operation.

The place to begin to impart the gospel is not far off, but close by with the next man. Home missions logically precede foreign missions.

Further, the Jews were better prepared for receiving the gospel than the Gentiles. They had been trained for this privilege and ought to have given it a ready and fruitful reception. The richest and most easily worked soil is cultivated first.

The disciples were to be gone on this mission only a few days or weeks, and they could accomplish more in so short a time in the garden of the Jews than in the unbroken wilderness of the Gentiles.

Thus the gospel was given to the Jews first, not as an act of favoritism to them, nor in order to keep it from others, but because they were the best point from which to start it on its worldwide mission. The Gentiles were the

larger field and may have looked more inviting and inspiring to the disciples, but the smaller field was the best for them.

Christ knows all conditions and adaptations, and when he chooses a field for us, however hard and small it may seem, it is the best place in all the world for us to serve him.

3. Their Message

The field having been assigned to them, the next point was to give them a message. Already Jesus had given them "power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease."

It is important that disciples do not go forth in the name of Christ until they have been filled with his spirit and endued with some of his power. We cannot give what we have not received, nor heal others until we are healed ourselves. We are to stay with Christ until we absorb his spirit and then we are to go to impart the same spirit unto others.

We do this through the message Jesus gave to his disciples and that he still gives us. "The kingdom of heaven is at hand," was the proclamation they were to make.

Christ comes to introduce a kingdom of order and peace, of law and liberty into the confusion and strife and bondage of the world.

The Jews were waiting for a kingdom with passionate longing, and this message would catch their eager attention. But their idea of the kingdom was of the earth earthy, and it was proclaimed as a kingdom of heaven.

It is not based on worldly power and splendor, but its throne is in heaven and its power is spiritual. It is built up, not over men, but in men; it consists not in outer position but in inner disposition.

This kingdom was at hand to the Jews: the King had come and was manifesting his royal rule; and after his crucifixion and resurrection the kingdom would come in Pentecostal power.

This kingdom has come to us. It is not far off, but is nigh us and may be in our hearts. The greatest blessings of life are not far away in some distant gold field or diamond mine, or far up some inaccessible height of learning or

distinction, but they are close by, and all we have to do is to receive them and make them ours.

Their message was to be illustrated with works of healing. They were to heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, and cast out devils. They were to have in them some of the omnipotence of Christ and do the same things he did.

The gospel in their hands was not to be a mere theory, but a practical power.

Their mission was to be a march of mercy whose monuments would be healed men and saved souls.

It is still our commission as ministers and teachers to go everywhere preaching the kingdom and touching the world with healing hands.

Part of this work has now been committed to physicians who are specially trained and skilled in it, and the hospital is simply an annex or extension of the church.

The gospel must not be kept up in the pulpit, but it must be got down into daily life where it will heal the sick, cleanse lepers and cast out devils.

This work is going on in our modern world on a wider scale than ever before, and the gospel is proving that it is the power of God unto salvation.

4. Their Compensation

The next point naturally was their compensation. What salary were these disciples to receive? This is one of the first questions with the minister today, and these disciples with their Jewish instincts were not insensible to this point.

"Freely ye have received," said Jesus, "Freely give." Receive no money for God's grace; charge no fee for healing the sick; turn not the work of saving the lost into an unholy traffic for gain.

This admonition was specially needful for these disciples that were made of ordinary human nature and had among their number a Judas Iscariot.

The temptation would be strong in them, having been taken out of poverty and clothed with such authority, to use their position and power for personal profit, the very temptation with which Satan attacked Jesus himself in the wilderness.

This temptation has always been a great danger and out of it have grown some of the most fearful corruptions of the church.

> But Jesus Christ did not come into the world to make money either for himself or for his disciples, and at the beginning he laid the axe at the root of this tree of evil by ordaining that the gospel should be given freely, "without money and without price."
>
> Few things are so ruinous to the ministry as an instinct for money and the love of personal comfort. Any suspicion of self-interest and a mercenary spirit puts a blight on Christian service.

Yet because the disciples were to charge nothing for the grace of the gospel they were not therefore to receive nothing for their support. They were to throw themselves on the hospitality of the people and be taken care of while they preached.

Ministers dare not charge for the grace of God, but they ought and must receive support while they are administering it.

> The gospel itself is free, but the preaching of the gospel costs. Water as it falls in rain, gushes up in springs and flows in streams, is free; but it costs something to have it brought in pipes into our homes.
>
> Having received the grace of the gospel freely ourselves, we should impart it freely to those around us and out to the ends of the earth.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. What is the harvest that now awaits us in the world?
2. How can we receive preparation for spreading the gospel?
3. Is healing the sick now a part of the ministry of the church?
4. What is the kingdom of heaven?
5. Should Sunday school teachers be paid for their work?

LESSON II.—OCTOBER 12

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

The Sermon on the Mount in Daily Living

Golden Text: Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done. Matthew 6:10.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 65:9-13.

Lesson Material: Matthew 5—7.

Lesson Text: Matthew 6:5–15

5 ¶ And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites *are:* for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.
6 But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.
7 But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen *do:* for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking.
8 Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.
9 After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.
10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as *it is* in heaven.
11 Give us this day our daily bread.
12 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
13 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.
14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:
15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. Prayer as a Performance.
2. Vain Repetitions.
3. The Model Prayer.
4. Its Climax and Conclusion.

Down from this Galilean mountain-top
Rolled words that are eternal laws of life,
More deeply grounded than its granite base;
Flowed strains of sweetness that have power to set
This inharmonious world in tune, and cause
Our jarring lives to grow to mellow music.

The lesson is a piece hewn out of the mountain sermon. It deals with prayer, which is the soul's topmost blossom issuing in life's finest fruitage. Prayer is a simple exercise in which the humblest soul can engage, and yet it is a high art calling for the best teaching and example, study and effort.

Jesus himself prayed, stood so close to God that he could speak with him face to face, and therefore he could teach others to pray. He was at his best, if we may so speak, at this moment, and never from his lips issued grander, sweeter music than this immortal prayer.

1. Prayer as a Performance

Prayer, the highest and finest state of the soul, is attended with some of the deadliest dangers, as around snow-capped, sky-bathed mountain tops sweep the fiercest storms.

Jesus warns us against some of these dangers.

One danger is that of turning prayer into an actor's performance. "Thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men." The Jews observed stated hours of prayer—morning, noon and evening—and these hypocrites took care at such times to be caught at some public place such as a conspicuous street corner, where they would strike the attitude of prayer and pose and perform before the crowd.

They would thus put on prayer as the actor puts on his mask, and then with furtive glances would slyly observe how their piety was impressing the public.

That kind of prayer did not cease to be performed when the last Pharisee with his broad phylacteries and public attitudinizing passed out of the world. It repeats itself in every prayer that is addressed to men rather than to God.

The man that, when he comes to pray, whether in the pulpit or in the prayer meeting, betrays consciousness of his human audience in affected tones and stilted rhetoric, is simply putting on the actor's mask. "An

eloquent prayer," of which we sometimes read, may not be a prayer at all, but only an eloquent performance.

"Verily I say unto you, They have their reward," said Jesus. They did not really ask God for anything and so they did not get anything from him. The praise of men is what they were seeking, and this is what they got. They were able to fool simple-minded folk for a few minutes and a bit of praise was their poor reward.

Every soul can get its own reward, what it is really seeking; but any reward that squats upon the earth and has no connection with heaven will not add to our worth and wealth, but will only make us poor.

One cure for hypocritical praying is found in private devotions. "But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."

Of course, this direction was not intended to forbid public prayer, which has its necessary place, but over against hypocritical acting sets a form of prayer that is not subject to this danger.

The soul that holds communion with God face to face in secret will be less likely to forget him in public.

2. Vain Repetitions

A second danger to prayer is found in vain repetitions. "Use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think they shall be heard for their much speaking."

Instances of this are found in the conduct of the priests of Baal (I Kings 17:26), and of the mob of Ephesus (Acts 19:34). The theory of such repetition seems to be that God is dull of hearing and needs to have prayer dinned into his ears, or that he measures the value of a prayer by the number of times it is repeated.

This kind of praying has by no means died out of the world.

The counting of beads on a rosary, each bead registering a prayer, has reduced it to a mechanical form. The Buddhists have carried this theory

to its logical extreme by introducing labor-saving machinery into their praying and thereby enormously increasing production.

A "cylinder is stuffed full of short, written prayers and every time it is turned upon its axis all the prayers it contains are regarded as duly said. All that the prayer has to do is to give the wheel a twirl and it grinds out prayers with a rapidity and fluency which leave nothing to be desired."

The form this danger assumes for us is that of falling into ruts of prayer that become mere mechanical repetitions.

Conventional petitions and set phrases wear grooves in our prayers along which we may roll our words without any accompanying action of the mind and heart. This kind of praying does not differ essentially from counting beads or turning a wheel.

There is no objection to set phrases and prescribed forms of prayer—they have their place and use—provided such forms do not degenerate into mechanical repetitions but are kept alive and meaningful with the devotional spirit.

Jesus cut up by the roots the reason for these repetitions: "for your heavenly Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him." The purpose of prayer is not to inform God as though he were dependent on us for the latest bulletins of our spiritual condition, and therefore no amount of reiteration and vociferation will make him any the wiser or more willing.

If it be said that this cuts up petitions as well as repetitions, the answer is that this mistakes the true nature and purpose of prayer. Prayer is not teasing God into giving us favors, but it is communion with him through which he imparts to us blessings he could not otherwise bestow.

3. The Model Prayer

The Lord of prayer now taught the people the prayer of the Lord.

It is a model prayer of marvelous simplicity and comprehensiveness, helpfulness and beauty.

The sentences are short and the words are the plain speech of the common people. There is not one theological word in it. The whole prayer contains only six petitions and can be slowly uttered in less than half a minute.

How startling the contrast with many a prayer in the pulpit that may stretch its repetitious and wearisome length out to half an hour and even more.

Yet this prayer sweeps heaven and earth in its range and grasp and leaves out no good thing.

It contains the roots and germs of all worship and blessing.

Its first word strikes the keynote of Christian faith and theology. More than any other word the name Father tells us what God is, showering upon us the most charming memories and suggestions. It asserts his sovereignty and power and wisdom, and also his care and mercy and love.

In making him our Father, it equally makes us his children and asserts our kinship with God. More than any other aspect this thought of God matches the human soul and fills it full.

"Hallowed be thy name," is the first petition. We might think we could have made a better start.

Should not some pressing human need have been put in the conspicuous forefront of this prayer?

But it begins with divine interests and looks straight away from human needs. The prayer, however, begins at the right point. Right relation with God is the central condition and foundation of all blessings. Reverence is the root of all virtues. Unless God be respected, the human soul has nothing to look up to, no ideal above it, no authority over it.

So the prayer proceeds to move along these heavenly heights. "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." Will the prayer never reach our human needs and hear our human cries?

It is the mountain tops, however, that keep the valleys green, and all our blessings come from above.

The kingdom of God includes all good things on earth and in heaven and its coming is infinitely the greatest good that can be bestowed upon this world. If we have this all other good things will be added unto us, thrown in extra.

The will of God is the highest wisdom and love, and the best thing that can come to us is to have his will done.

We sometimes think of the will of God as though it were an irresistible if not a hard fate to which we must submit, whereas it is the kindest and most beautiful thing that can happen in this world.

Nothing else could be half so welcome to us as the will of God if we only knew the depths and the heights of blessing it contains and will bring.

The prayer, then, does well to move through half its petitions along the mountain summits of God's kingdom and will, for the first thing to do is to get right with God in this world, as the first thing to do in beginning a building is to lay the right foundation, or in striking a circle is to get the right point for its center.

4. Its Climax and Conclusion

The turning point in the prayer is at last reached. "Give us this day our daily bread."

The prayer suddenly drops from the highest spiritual aspiration to the lowest physical need; in the midst of the holiest longings of the soul the human stomach has something to say.

All the material conditions of life, bread, health, prosperity, are rightly the subject of prayer. Religion covers the whole life from top to bottom.

Do not hesitate to speak with God on any subject. Whatever it is right to speak about with others, or to think about with yourself, it is right to speak about with your heavenly Father.

Yet our requests touching our material life must be kept within modest bounds for the necessities of life. Our daily bread, and not a year's supply or rich poundcake or a secure bank account, is all we are authorized to ask for.

"And forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors."

Having descended to and lightly touched our bodily needs, the prayer quickly bounds back into the spirit and rises to heavenly things.

Forgiveness is a fundamental need of life and is a root of purity, peace and power. But this blessing is available only for those that forgive others.

We cannot get what we do not give in the spiritual world.

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil." The great fear of the prayer is not poverty or suffering, but evil, and it shrinks from its slimy touch.

We cannot desire to enter into temptation in the sense of trial and ought not to enter into evil solicitations, but if God takes us in we are to turn the temptation into victory.

"For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever." These words, though added by some later hand, carry the prayer back up to God, its fitting climax and conclusion, for all things must end in the kingdom and the glory of God.

Such is the model prayer, short, simple, comprehensive, laying hold of the greatest blessings and rifling heaven and earth for our enrichment.

If we learn to pray after this manner, in its spirit, we shall know what things we ought to pray for, and whatsoever we ask it shall be done unto us.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. What various hypocritical masks may we wear in our religion?
2. Why did Jesus pray and why should we pray?
3. What are some of the points of a good prayer?
4. Should we study and prepare our public prayers?
5. What is the fundamental condition of all true prayer?

LESSON III.—OCTOBER 19

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

How May I Improve the Soil of My Heart?

Golden Text: The sower soweth the word. Mark 4:14.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 1.

Lesson Material: Mark 4:1-20.

Lesson Text: Mark 4:1-9

And he began again to teach by the sea side: and there was gathered unto him a great multitude, so that he entered into a ship, and sat in the sea; and the whole multitude was by the sea on the land.
2 And he taught them many things by parables, and said unto them in his doctrine,
3 Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow:
4 And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up.
5 And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth: and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth:
6 But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away.
7 And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit.
8 And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased, and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some a hundred.
9 And he said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. Wayside Paths.
2. Stony Soil.
3. Thorns.
4. Good Ground.
5. How We Hear.

On the shore of Lake Galilee standing on its sandy beach and sitting on its grassy banks were the assembled multitude, while from the pulpit of a fishing boat Jesus delivered to them this parable of the sower.

It was the first instance of his using this mode of teaching and seems to have surprised the disciples so that they asked him privately for an explanation.

A parable is a short story with a moral point: it is a picture of the truth.

An abstract statement of truth is difficult to grasp and is apt to be uninteresting. Put the same truth into the form of a story or illustration drawn from the familiar things of life, and instantly it takes on form and color and begins to attract attention.

Jesus was a master of illustration.

His parables were pictures formed out of the daily experiences of his hearers which brought his teachings home to every one's business and bosom.

He spoke to farmers of sowing and reaping, of wheat and tares; to fishermen of casting nets and sorting out fish and finding the pearl of great price. The listless housekeeper suddenly had her attention arrested by hearing mention of the leaven hid in the meal; and the workingman, weary with his day's toil, stopped to hear of the laborers employed in the vineyard.

Jesus spoke in the language of daily life and made religion as real and practical as farming and fishing. His sermons were picturesque and attractive, his hearers knew what he was talking about, and the common people heard him gladly.

The main object of this parable is to describe four classes of hearers with the view of persuading us to take heed how we hear.

1. Wayside Paths

First, are those that receive the seed of truth on the wayside. The wayside is the path or road running through the grainfield, which was traveled over so that it was kept beaten down bare and hard, and seeds falling upon it were quickly picked up by the greedy, watchful birds that were hovering about.

Our hearts are thus being traveled over and beaten down.

First come our sins trampling over us with their hardening hoofs. Every wrong thought and deed leaves a hardened footprint in the soul.

The farmer will not walk across his wheatfield that is just growing green, for every step would crush some tender blade and destroy so much golden

grain. This is what we are doing when we are walking in the ways of sin, tramping across the fine wheatfield of our own heart and rudely crushing many a tender plant that would yield us a rich harvest.

Then comes the great traffic of the world rolling its iron wheels over our hearts.

There are pleasures that destroy our relish for spiritual things. The coarse love of gain tramples upon our finer sensibilities until it has beaten them down hard as a stone pavement.

What chance have the seeds of truth falling on such hearts to take root and grow? The mind may listen, but the heart is so insensible that it receives no impression. Quickly some worldly thought or desire comes in and snatches the truth away.

Jesus says that the devil takes away the word of truth, for all the influences that work against religious truth and steal it out of the heart are servants of Satan, doing his work. Upon hardened sinners and worldly people the gospel often falls as upon beaten ground.

2. Stony Soil

The second class of hearers are those that receive the seed upon stony soil. By stony ground is meant an underlying sheet of rock which is barely covered with a thin layer of soil. The seeds falling into this warm soil quickly take root; and when the roots strike the barrier of rock, the plant all the more luxuriantly shoots up into stalk; but having no depth of earth and permanent source of moisture, under the scorching sun it soon withers.

This represents a ready reception of the truth and a fair promise thwarted by a fatal deficiency. There is no depth of earth, no deeply rooted convictions.

This joyful reception of the truth is only superficial and temporary. It may be due to an emotional nature that responds to every appeal as a leaf flutters before every breath of air.

There are people that like to have their feelings touched, that cry as easily as children, to whom tears are a kind of luxury.

Or this temporary conversion may be due to the charm of eloquence and music that lays a spell upon the mind.

Especially may it be induced by religious excitement that is affecting many minds with its contagion.

What becomes of this truth that shoots up so rapidly? It soon withers. These temporary causes cease to act. The excitement passes away, and the ordinary experiences of life return.

The old temptations, together with new trials, the dull routine, come back, and the old nature resumes its sway. A thin surface of emotion has been stirred up, but the old heart of rock lies below unchanged.

Such converts do not last and are soon ready for the next revival.

3. Thorns

The third class of hearers are those that receive the truth among thorns.

By thorns are meant the old seeds and roots that remain in the ground after it has been plowed and the good grain has been sown.

These grew up more rapidly than the wheat, so that they took away its nourishment, shut out its light, and thus choked its growth.

These thorns are the old disposition, desires and habits of the unconverted nature.

At the time of conversion they were cut down and seemed to be removed. But they are not wholly removed or dead, and by and by they will begin to sprout and shoot up. Old habits will struggle to assert themselves. If they are allowed to get a start, they will grow rapidly and choke the new life, for they grow at its expense.

Cares and riches and pleasures are some of these old thorn-roots. Though the gospel seed is planted in the heart, yet the anxieties of life remain to be borne and battled with, temptations continue to play upon the new seed, and if the old thorns are permitted to sprout in the heart they will check the growth of purity and peace.

Worry kills worship. They that like Martha thus overburden and distract themselves will lose the good part which Mary found.

4. Good Ground

The fourth class of hearers are those that receive the seed into good ground. Good ground is that which is well broken up, has depth of earth, and upon which the seed springs up and bears thirty and sixty and even a hundred fold.

This represents a good and honest heart, which having heard the word keeps it and brings forth fruit with patience.

In what sense is such a heart good? Not in the sense that it is naturally and perfectly good, for there is no such heart in any human breast. But some hearts are naturally better fitted for receiving truth, are more open and earnest than others, and in this sense are comparatively good.

But the full meaning of the phrase doubtless points to a heart that has been furrowed by the plough of the Holy Spirit.

When a heart feels its guilt and need of a Saviour; when it repents of its sins, clearing away the old roots, that heart is good soil in which the gospel will take root and grow.

A mind open to all truth from whatever quarter it comes, candor in examining its evidences and claims, the scientific spirit of simple truth-seeking, is the primary virtue of the mind in all fields.

We should desire and seek to know reality whatever may be the consequences, though our heaven falls. The cry for reality is the dominant note of our day.

This is the spirit and demand of the Bible itself which all the way through bids us prove all things and hold fast only that which is true and good. The follower of him who declared, "I am the truth," should be eminently marked by this spirit of truth-seeking and especially in relation to Christ himself.

The truth of the gospel will not then simply fall on the surface of the mind where the first passing thought may carry it off, but it will receive a sympathetic welcome and drop deep into the heart.

Such truth does not simply play upon the feelings, but it takes hold of the convictions; it is not mixed up and choked with old sinful seeds and roots, but kept pure and given the whole field. Truth so received bears fruit.

5. How We Hear

The main point of the parable is the one that Jesus himself drew from it, that we should take heed how we hear. Preaching is thought to be a difficult thing involving great responsibility, but hearing is generally supposed to be easy, involving little or no responsibility.

But in fact hearing is in a sense as difficult and responsible work as preaching and teaching.

There is plenty of poor preaching abroad in the land, but there is vastly more poor hearing.

Good hearing implies prayerful preparation and a right state of mind; sympathetic attention to and concentration of thought upon the subject; and these are a difficult exercise of mind.

But the main point in good hearing is the purpose to obey the truth received.

Hearing that does not lead to doing is folly that may cost us disastrously.

It makes some difference to the merchant how he hears the orders of his customers; or to the locomotive engineer how he hears or reads the orders of the train dispatcher; or to the soldier how he hears the commands of his officer; or to the patient how he hears the directions of his physician; or to one asleep in a burning house how he hears the voice calling upon him to escape for his life.

On the way we hear may depend life itself.

Infinitely greater difference does it make how we hear the voice of the Lord Jesus calling upon us to repent and believe upon him and to do his will. On such hearing depends eternity.

Doing is also one of the most effective means of understanding the truth received. We do not know anything thoroughly until we do it. We may

hear much about music or any other art, but we do not really know music until we practice it.

After we have entered into the kingdom of knowledge through the door of obedience we can then hear about it understandingly.

One reason we hear so poorly is that we obey so imperfectly. If we are willing to do we shall know the truth as we hear it.

Therefore every one that heareth these sayings of his and doeth them is like a man that built his house upon the rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of his and doeth them not is like a man that built his house on the sand; and when the floods came and the winds blew, it fell; and great was the fall of it. Take heed therefore how ye hear.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. How many parables were spoken by Jesus?
2. What parables are in the Old Testament?
3. Have any teachers and writers other than Jesus used parables?
4. Name the distinctive features of these four kinds of soil.
5. How can we improve the soil of our hearts?
6. How can we cultivate good hearing?

LESSON IV.—OCTOBER 26

THE STILLING OF THE STORM

How to Meet the Storms of Life

Golden Text: What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him? Mark 4:41.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 107:23–32.

Lesson Material: Matt. 8:18, 23–27; Luke 8:4–15.

Lesson Text: Mark 4:35–41

35 And the same day, when the even was come, he saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side.
36 And when they had sent away the multitude, they took him even as he was in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships.
37 And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full.
38 And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish?
39 And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.
40 And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?
41 And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. The Lake and the Storm.
2. Jesus Asleep in the Boat.
3. The Frightened Disciples.
4. Jesus Master of the Storm.
5. Why So Fearful?
6. What Manner of Man!

It was at the close of a busy day of teaching that this incident occurred. Using a boat for his pulpit Jesus preached to a vast audience that crowded the shore and spread out over the sea in other boats around him.

As evening drew on and he needed rest he saw that the only way he could escape the multitude and find retirement was to cross the lake to the other side. He directed the disciples to do this, and soon the boat was sailing across blue Galilee.

1. The Lake and the Storm

This lake, rimmed in with abrupt mountain walls cut deep with wadies or canyons, is subject to sudden and violent storms. The winds rush down the ravines and lash the placid sea into a boiling, foaming mass of maddened waters.

Such a storm fell upon the lake on this evening, and presently the boat containing Jesus and his disciples was being tossed about like a bit of wood on the angry waves.

This incident may properly be viewed as a parable of life in which we see some important lessons vividly illustrated.

The sea is a favorite symbol of human life in all literatures. Its smooth surface and bright prospect and pleasant sailing and its changefulness and storm and mystery and tragedy,—how these reflect our experience!

Human life, like the sea, is peculiarly subject to storm.

We might think that life in God's world would always be smooth and safe and pleasant, but he has not made it so. It has its broad, bright expanse when heaven pours its splendor upon it and it seems like a sea of glass and life is all joy, and then its skies darken and break into a storm that sends all God's waves and billows over us.

Temptation and trial, disappointment and loss, suffering and sorrow and death,—what power have these to lash the sea of life into angry foam and turn it into tragedy and despair.

And such a storm may burst upon us in the way of duty. If it overtook us only when we were escaping like Jonah from duty or were on some forbidden path that it might bring us to repentance and whip us back into the right way, we could understand it and it would win our approval.

But Jesus had bidden these disciples to cross the lake and he himself was in the boat with them when the tempest struck them; and we may be in the way of duty, acting under the express command of God, even serving with the fullest loyalty and sacrifice, when he blots out all our sky and rolls all his billows over us.

2. Jesus Asleep in the Boat

Where was Jesus in this storm? "In the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow."

It is a beautiful touch of the humanity of Jesus.

How could he sleep while his disciples were in such danger and distress and were not only wide awake but wild awake?

He slept, first, because he was tired.

Weary with his day's labor, in which he had expended his strength and imparted his soul to the multitude, spent in body and in mind, he lay down in the arms of "nature's sweet restorer."

That is the first secret of sleep: be busy by day so that you will be healthily weary and can sleep by night.

Next, Jesus had not done anything that day that troubled his conscience that night; and this is the second secret of sleep: do not do anything by day that will keep you awake at night.

Again Jesus prayed to the Father and committed himself to his care so that he could sleep in a storm without fear; and this is still another secret of sleep: cast all your care upon God in faith and prayer, and then lie down in trust. So God "giveth his beloved sleep."

The Master slept while his disciples were in danger and distress. does it not often seem so to us still? How often when the storms of life are beating around us does God seem to be asleep and there appears to be no one to hear our cry!

But we cannot always tell what God is doing from human appearances. For a small moment he may forsake us, but with great mercies he will gather us. All his waves and billows may be sweeping over us, yet God has not forgotten us, and "He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep."

3. The Frightened Disciples

What did these disciples do? No doubt they did their best to manage the boat. They were fishermen that knew that lake and were expert in the arts

of seamanship, many a storm had they weathered, and they knew how to reef the sails and scud before the wind.

But this storm was too much for them. The waves were beating into the boat and filling it with water, and they thought that they must have instant help, or it would soon be all over with them.

At this point of peril they awoke Jesus and said to him, "Master, carest thou not that we perish?" "Lord, save us: we perish," is the form in which Matthew records their prayer; and Luke's form is, "Master, master, we perish!" In all these forms the prayer is the cry of perishing men for salvation.

The disciples appeal to Jesus as Master or Lord: not as another boatman or fellow man, but as Lord who was mighty to save.

They knew that his power underlay and overtopped that sea and storm and could curb its wrath and put a hook in its mighty, frothy jaws and bring it low; and their faith in him, though at times it wavered and was near to unbelief, now rose in its strength and cast itself upon him.

It has become proverbial that in a storm at sea even infidels and scoffers pray.

Few things so overwhelm men with a sense of their dependence and helplessness and cause them so fully to believe in and fling themselves upon a Higher Power. There are moments in life when God is the Great Necessity and the soul instinctively flies to him.

We should trust in the Lord at all times, but especially in the hour of darkness and storm. "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me. Yet the Lord will command his loving kindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life."

4. Jesus Master of the Storm

This prayer was immediately answered. The sleeping Christ awoke and arose and stood upon the deck of that sinking ship, and with calm dignity and self-possession, as of one who knew that he held that sea in the hollow of his hand, he said, "Peace, be still."

The tempest-driven waters recognized a higher power than all the fury of

the wind, and instantly the storm ceased and the waves fell flat and the holy calm of evening lay upon the sea.

Can we believe such a miracle? Why not? All three synoptic evangelists record it as though it were something they could not forget or omit, and it has on it the inimitable marks of truth.

And what is it more than the mastery of mind over matter?

The human spirit can quiet down and control the agitated human body even when it is in a paroxysm of pain, and cannot the divine Spirit that pervades the world master it at every point and mold it to his purposes? One of the deepest facts of the universe is that matter is servant of mind and may be only one mode of its expression, and this miracle is an instance of this fact.

The Lord Christ can control other storms than those that rage at sea: the storms of temptation and trial, of disappointment and loss, of suffering and sorrow and the great storm of death, these also at his bidding will grow still in our breasts and a holy calm will fall upon our souls.

5. Why So Fearful?

Having quieted the sea the Master now turned to the disciples. "And he saith unto them, why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?"

It appears, then, that there are worse storms than those that vex the sea. The clouds of doubt that overhang the mind and heart and at times break into storms of unbelief,—can any worse thing befall us?

These can paralyze our motives and hopes, embitter our days and darken all our life. Whatever physical clouds may hide our earthly sky or storms of sharp distress invade our lives, it is more than all things else important that we keep our spiritual sky clear and bright and see the face of God.

All our fears are the result of our lack of faith.

If we really believed that God is all in all, in whom we live and move and have our being, who holds all events in his hand and is causing them to work

together for our good, from whose care and love neither life nor death nor any other creature can separate us, would we not face the stress of any storm and fear no evil?

These disciples had faith in their Master, but they did not have enough faith to do their work and let him sleep. We should strive to have and exercise such faith in God that we shall trust him and go on with our work even though he seems to be asleep.

Pray to him we should, but our faith should be deeper than any storm and we should be able to exclaim in any direst extremity, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him."

6. What Manner of Man!

What effect did this deliverance have upon the disciples? "And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?" They had seen other exhibitions of the miracle-working power of Jesus, but this so surpassed all other wonders that they felt that they did not know him and exclaimed, "What manner of man is this!"

Yet the storm added nothing to Jesus, but only brought out what was in him.

An observer, noting the men in that boat as it drew away from the shore that evening, would not have discerned any marked difference in its occupants. They were all plain men, wearing about the same garb and belonging to the same class.

But the storm suddenly revealed a difference between them of immense range and power and showed one to be divine and made him master of the others and of the sea. Lincoln did not seem to differ greatly from other men until the Civil War came: then his power came out and he stood master of the hour and the nation.

Jesus did not seem to many of his contemporaries to be other than a common man and a deluded and dangerous one at that. Yet the centuries have brought out the real nature and rank and power of this Man and revealed him as the Son of God and Saviour of the world.

Do we think that we fully know Christ? This is the folly of our superficial knowledge and the blindness of our conceit. We also need some outburst of his power or extraordinary experience to shock us out of our self-satisfied shallowness and give us a new vision of Christ. Then we shall exclaim, "What manner of Man is this!"

Even the centuries obey him and swing into their orbits around his cradle and date their calendar from his birth. Our greatest safety and comfort and blessing consists in trusting him in all the experiences and storms of life. Show us thyself, O Christ!

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. Give some account of the situation and nature of Lake Galilee.
2. Is God ever asleep, and in what sense does he seem at times to be so?
3. What would have happened if the disciples had not wakened Jesus?
4. What things should we fear in this world?
5. What evidence do we have that Christ is still controlling the world?

LESSON V.—NOVEMBER 2

THE PRODIGAL SON—WORLD'S TEMPERANCE SUNDAY

Prodigals: Prevention and Rescue

Golden Text: I will arise and go to my father. Luke 15:18.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 51: 1–8.

Lesson Material: Matt. 18: 12–14; Luke 15: 1–10.

Lesson Text: Luke 15:11–24

11 ¶ And he said, A certain man had two sons:
12 And the younger of them said to *his* father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth *to me*. And he divided unto them *his* living.
13 And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.
14 And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.
15 And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.
16 And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.
17 And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!
18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee.
19 And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.
20 And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.
21 And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.
22 But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put *it* on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on *his* feet:
23 And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill *it;* and let us eat, and be merry:
24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. ***Scene I: Leaving Home.***
2. ***Scene II: A Round of Revelry.***
3. ***Scene III: At the Swine-trough.***
4. ***Scene IV: Thinking It Over.***
5. ***Scene V: Going Back Home.***
6. ***Scene VI: Minstrelsy in the Old Homestead.***

The Prodigal Son is the most beautiful and precious parable uttered by Jesus.

It is a masterpiece of picturesque and dramatic description, depicting human life in its many-colored aspects, revealing the interior play of its movements and motives, and portraying the vital workings of sin and salvation.

It sweeps the whole circle of theology, starting with man in his Father's house, tracing his fall through demanding his goods and leaving home, down through revelry to the pigsty and swine-trough, and his return through thinking it over and going back home, to the minstrelsy and dance in the old homestead when Father and son are again reunited in fellowship and joy.

1. Scene I: Leaving Home

First we witness a scene in which the home life is broken. Two sons are enjoying their father's protection and love.

The father was equally the father of both sons, though one remained loyal to him in the home and the other rebelled against him and wandered far.

His fatherhood both antedated and outlasted his unfaithful son's rebellion, and he was still the father of the prodigal in his deepest degradation.

This is the purpose and point of the parable. God is the Father of all men, of unconverted sinners as well as of believing saints.

His Fatherhood is rooted back of redemption and back of the fall and had its origin when he said, "Let us make man in our image," and it survives through all human sinfulness.

The father with his sons in his home pictures the ideal relation between God and his human children; a relation of protection and care on the one side and of obedience and loyalty on the other, the whole relation being suffused with love and joy.

Into this happy home crept a devil.

The younger son asked the father for his portion of the property. He made no complaint against his father, he alleged no unfairness or grievance, but some fatal thought had come into his heart of wider liberty and a better time elsewhere.

The home seemed narrow and unattractive, and the world looked rosy and sin tasted sweet.

So the foolish boy grew alienated from his father and asked for a division of the property and a separation. Sin starts in wrong thoughts of God, of his law and his life, and thinks it can find a better way.

The father divided his property and gave the dissatisfied son his portion, for he could not have kept him in the home by force.

God, having created us free moral beings, has endowed us with a degree of sovereignty which he cannot infringe upon, and must let us do as we will. Our substance, character and destiny are committed to our own hands.

2. Scene II: A Round of Revelry

Events moved swiftly and we witness in Scene II a round of revelry. Not many days after, the infatuated youth gathered all together and took his journey into a far country.

Thought soon leaped into action, doubt started towards damnation.

It is a terrible mistake to suppose that we can have evil thoughts in our hearts and not do evil deeds. If we doubt God we shall soon be on our way to the devil.

He "gathered all together," for when a man starts into sin he takes all he has with him, property, habits, character and soul. Many a man flatters himself that he will take into the devil's country only one little portion of his substance, such as a single secret appetite, and that he will keep all the rest safe in the land of good reputation, but in reality all he has goes with him and at last shares in his degradation.

He went into a far country where he thought he would be free from all restrictions and could have the best possible time in doing as he pleased.

The fatal thought is ever whispered in our ears that the farther we can get from God and the freer from his laws, the more life and liberty we shall enjoy.

In that far land he wasted his substance in riotous living. Life became a round of revelry and a whirl of pleasure in which his money was soon spent.

Sin wastes substance.

It never creates but only destroys. It wastes property, money and time.

Vice is expensive, and the devil presents big bills.

It wastes business, energy and skill. It wastes the body, poisons the blood, burns up the tissues, and rots the bones. It cuts deeper, and slashes into character, deadens conscience, and destroys the soul bit by bit.

Righteous living increases substance, but riotous living wastes it and leaves a man a financial, physical and moral bankrupt.

3. Scene III: At the Swine-trough

Next we see the bottom of the downward road. The prodigal had a good time while his money lasted and he moved through a many-colored maze of pleasure, but all the while he was swiftly sliding down and soon he reached the bottom.

"When he had spent all," was the first signal of the end.

Vice spends all that a man has. It has an insatiable greed that eats up the last dollar and the last atom of good.

Then come famine, and want begins to cry out in distress. It is the blindness of sin that it never considers the end thereof until it is reduced to beggary and its doom is upon it.

The prodigal was forced to do something for a bare living, and he entered into the service of a citizen of the country who sent him into his fields to feed swine.

This was abhorrent work for a Jew and pictures the degrading slavery to which sin reduces its victims.

The sinful pleasures that are at first sweet liberty at last become vile bondage. Wreathes of roses are transformed into coils of serpents. "The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices make instruments to scourge us."

"And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat" this marks the lowest point of his degradation, he is now at the bottom of the hill. He lived with pigs and was no better than they; in some respects he was worse off.

Sin sinks the spirit in the flesh and reduces man to a beast. It turns the world into a pigsty and sends the soul to the swine-trough.

While his money lasted the prodigal had plenty of friends and all sorts of people scraped acquaintance with him and were profuse in their flatteries, but now "no man gave unto him." Everybody cut his acquaintance, and nobody so much as recognized him or gave him a crumb of bread.

Friendships cemented with sin will not hold together. Evil companions at length turn against one another and have no truth or honor or mercy among themselves.

Sin is anti-social in its nature and work and at last cuts all friendly ties and reduces the evil doer to a terrible isolation in which no one cares for him.

4. Scene IV: Thinking It Over

We have now reached the turning point in the prodigal's career and we find him thinking it over.

"When he came to himself" is the expressive phrase that introduces the change. The words imply that he had been away from himself, out of his right mind.

Sin is insanity.

It puts one out of his right mind so that he sees all things in wrong proportions and relations. It perverts the judgment and throws the brain out of gear with the world.

This was the condition of the prodigal in his downward course from his father's house to the hogpen and swine-trough. When he started out an

alluring scene lay before him and he saw all things in false lights and colors. Life was to be a continual revelry and he saw no wrong in it and secretly laughed at his father's old-fashioned notions.

His father stood in his way and he did not need the old man any more!

But now his evil life has wholly changed its aspects, and the rosy hues that his imagination threw around it have all faded away and he sees its sombre colors and guilty features. He is no longer blinded to its wrong and ruinous nature, but he sees its sin; and his soul recoils from it as from a dreadful thing.

Reflection has brought him to his senses and restored his sanity.

Famine and want have been the hard teachers that have led him to consider. The swine husks were a continual suggestion of his father's house and the plenty that was there.

So he has got back out of his false world, which his sinful imagination pictured, into the real world; his thoughts now correspond with things; his mind fits the facts; and he has so far come to his true self, he is a sane man.

Reflection is the first step in repentance, and there is always hope for a man that will stop and consider and thus come to his true self.

5. Scene V: Going Back Home

In the next scene we see the prodigal on his way back home. "I will arise and go to my father," was the determination that grew up in his heart. The root of this resolution is the sovereign "I will."

His will had brought him away from his father and now his will must take him back.

His father could not prevent his departure and his father could not force his return. God can throw many an influence around us to draw us back to himself; but he cannot force us back and we never shall return until we ourselves resolve to return to him.

The prodigal's resolution grew along the three lines of faith, penitence and obedience.

"I will go to my father," was his faith. He still had confidence in his father.

Faith is the first condition of approach to God. "I will say, Father, I have sinned," was his penitence. He did not come back claiming the rights of a son with a full share in the property, but declaring himself unworthy to be called a son.

"Make me as one of thy hired servants," was his obedience. He did not demand ease and abundance, but humbly asked for service and for any service, however hard and menial it might be.

Such faith, penitence and obedience are always a right path that leads the sinner's feet straight back to his Father's house, and he that cometh to God in this spirit shall in no wise be cast out.

6. Scene VI: Minstrelsy in the Old Homestead

The final scene is one of reconciliation.

The heart-broken father had never forgotten that wandering boy. Through all the years he had hoped and waited for his return.

The prodigal was approaching the old home with a trembling heart, wondering how he would be received. But the father was watching for him and caught the first glimpse while the son was yet a great way off, and he ran and fell upon his neck and kissed him.

The son could not finish his penitent speech before the father ordered out the best robe and a ring for his hand and the fattest calf for a feast, and presently the old homestead, that had so long mourned a wandering son, gleamed with lights and resounded with the music of minstrelsy and dance. Once more the broken home was restored and redemption was complete.

So waits the Father for the return of his human children and such is the reception they shall receive. The Father will never be satisfied and we shall never be saved until we are in his everlasting Arm.

"And they began to be merry." This is the final outcome of salvation. "In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand are pleasures forevermore."

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. Is there increasing unrest in our American homes?
2. Why do young people leave home against their parent's wishes?
3. How may we prevent young people from leaving home?
4. How can we draw wandering children back to the home?
5. In what sense are we prodigals?
6. Is God the Father of the impenitent?

LESSON VI.—NOVEMBER 9

THE FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND

How Jesus Satisfies

Golden Text: I am the bread of life. John 6:35.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 107: 1–9.

Lesson Material: Matt. 14: 13–21; Mark 6: 32–44; Luke 9: 10–17; John 6: 16–71.

Lesson Text: John 6:1–15

After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is *the sea* of Tiberias.
2 And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased.
3 And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples.
4 And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh.
5 ¶ When Jesus then lifted up *his* eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?
6 And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do.
7 Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little.
8 One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him,
9 There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?
10 And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand.
11 And Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would.
12 When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.
13 Therefore they gathered *them* together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten.
14 Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that Prophet that should come into the world.
15 ¶ When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. ***The Crowd Across the Lake.***
2. ***No Bread for the Multitude.***
3. ***A Boy with a Basket.***
4. ***The Distribution of the Bread.***
5. ***Fragments Gathered Up.***

Two circumstances combined to drive Jesus across Lake Galilee from the western to the northeastern shore at this time.

News had just come of the beheading of John the Baptist by Herod Antipas in his fury against the prophet for rebuking him for his unholy union with his wife, and there was danger that the enraged king would lay his hand on Jesus and on all who might be supposed to be in sympathy with John.

Jesus paid attention to matters of prudence, and therefore he retired for a little out of public view (Matt. 14:18).

The other consideration was the need of rest. His manifold ministry had grown into a great and constant burden, and it was necessary that he should have a season of relief (Mark 6:31).

So the Master and his disciples entered into a boat and pushed off for the opposite shore.

1. The Crowd Across the Lake

The word rapidly flew around that Jesus had gone across the lake, and presently the people began to gather from various directions and to follow him around the northern shore. Some of them in their haste ran and reached the landing place of the boat before its prow grated on the beach.

At about the same time a caravan on its way up to the feast of the Passover in Jerusalem was passing near the point, and the pilgrims joined the gathering company. Jesus had scarcely reached the mountain side where he had hoped to rest when he was confronted with a great multitude of people, demanding his sympathy and service.

Thus when he fled from his multiplying labors, his labors followed him up and gave him no rest.

Many a minister, fleeing from his city charge to the mountains, would feel imposed upon and irritated to have his vacation thus interrupted with a call to service, but Jesus "welcomed them" (Luke) and "had compassion on them" (Matt.).

He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and the presence of the needy people quickly overcame his own sense of need and drew him back into service.

Why did these people follow him? "Because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased."

Curiosity was a large element in their motive.

The Wonder-worker broke in upon the dull monotony of their lives with a fresh sensation and drew them in crowds, as any cheap wonder-worker does today.

Curiosity is not a high motive, and yet it plays a large and useful purpose in human life. It is the entering edge of knowledge, and it may be the entering point of faith.

Curiosity draws many people to church, especially when some noted minister is to preach or when revival is stirring the community with interest, and such people, coming with this comparatively low motive, often receive a rich blessing.

Many of these people doubtless had diseases and secretly hoped that they might be touched by the great Healer.

In any crowd of people drawn to a religious teacher or service there are many who may be moved by curiosity and may outwardly appear thoughtless, and yet inwardly they may be conscious of their spiritual need and may be secretly longing for a healing touch and the bread of life.

2. No Bread for the Multitude

Evening drew on and a difficulty loomed up. What would be done with this great multitude of people? They were so absorbed in the teaching of Jesus that they appear to have been unconscious of the lapse of time and of their hunger. Should they be dismissed in their weary and weak condition?

This was the proposal of the disciples (Matt.), but the humanity of Jesus protested against such a procedure.

He could have fed the people outright, even turning the stones of the mountain side into bread, but this was not his way. He ever linked his disciples with himself in his ministry and turned every incident to their instruction.

Not for personal information but with this educational end in view he turned to Philip with the question, "Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?"

Philip came from the neighboring town of Bethsaida and was acquainted with the region, so that it would be expected of him to deal with the situation. He also appears to have been a ready reckoner and practical business man, for he made a rapid mental calculation and immediately gave the answer, "Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little." This would be about thirty-eight dollars, which we can hardly suppose would have bought enough bread for the eight or ten thousand persons that may have been present.

Philip took a business man's view of the situation, but he left out of his calculation the presence of Jesus Christ. How often do we take everything into account in our plans that we can think of — except God!

The business man's view has its place and worth, but often it fails at this very point. It calculates to a cent the materials and financial factors in the case, but it leaves out the unseen and eternal. The solution of no problem is complete until God has been taken into the calculation.

3. A Boy with a Basket

At this point another disciple intervened and made a suggestion. Peter was generally ready to speak up and present his view on such occasions, but in this instance his more modest and less voluble brother, Andrew, ventured a remark.

"There is a lad here," he said, "which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?"

Evidently he thought this small boy and his pitifully few loaves and fishes were hardly worth mentioning, and he did mention them only to show their utter inadequacy.

On such a great occasion a boy was obviously too small and insignificant a figure as a factor in the case, and his loaves and fishes were ridiculously insufficient, and Andrew calls attention to them only to dismiss them.

Yet Jesus instantly said, "Bring them hither to me" (Matt.), and with

these means furnished by that boy he fed the five thousand men, besides women and children.

Andrew also made the mistake of leaving the unseen elements out of the problem: he could see only the boy and his little basket, but could not see the unsuspected possibilities that lay in them.

Every boy is a bundle of possibilities, and one day he may unfold his powers and astonish the world.

Wise old Trebonius, the German schoolmaster, made his bow to his boys every time he met them in his class, because he did not know what sparks of genius might be lying dormant in their brains: when Martin Luther stepped out of his school his premonition was justified.

Every teacher may have in his class and every pastor in his congregation a boy that may one day solve great problems and bless the world.

Respect the boys and be ready to train them, and early give them something to do in the Sunday school and church.

The Bible contains many instances in which children were golden links in the great plan of God and did vital deeds in his kingdom, and they may do useful things still.

Despise not small means, whether a boy or his basket, but train and use them so as to get the best out of them.

4. The Distribution of the Bread

"Make the men sit down," quietly said Jesus. This introduced order and organization into the work. Had he attempted to feed the multitude as a disorganized crowd, the work would have fallen into confusion and many would have been missed; but as the people sat in rows of hundreds and fifties, their many-colored garments on the green grass presenting the appearance of "flower-beds," as the word "ranks" (Mark) means, the work of distributing the bread proceeded in a rapid and systematic manner and not a man was missed.

This is the principle of organization and division of labor which is so effective and fruitful in the world of industry and is equally necessary in religious work.

Cut out and arrange your work, pick out your man and save him.

Jesus began the work by giving thanks for the bread, thus acknowledging the divine Giver and obtaining the divine blessing upon it.

This is the right way to begin a meal: ask the divine blessing on the bread, and then it will be better bread and in some way it will go farther.

Then Jesus gave the broken bread to the disciples, and the disciples carried it down along the ranks and gave it to the people, and they all ate and were filled.

That evening scene on the mountain-side by that lake on that distant yesterday is a beautiful picture of how the Bread of Life is distributed among the people today.

Jesus hands us the blessed Bread with the Father's benediction upon it. We are to partake of it ourselves and then pass it on to others. Every one of us has some rank or circle which has been specially assigned to us.

This is our blessed and beautiful mission and we should have great joy in it.

"They were filled." Let us never fear that the grace of God will ever run short. There is enough of it and plenty to supply the whole world, and every one can receive a blessing that will supply all his spiritual needs.

5. Fragments Gathered Up

"Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost," said Jesus. And they gathered up twelve baskets of fragments.

Was not this strange frugality on the part of him who could create such abundance?

But unbounded resources and the largest liberality may be closely connected with the strictest economy. The Hand that could create a whole loaf did not disdain to pick up a crumb.

God with his infinitude of resources never wastes anything, or lets any fragment fall useless and forgotten out of his hand.

Wealth is no excuse for waste.

Many a great fortune has grown out of gathering up fragments. The sewerage of Paris has been turned into a golden stream yielding two millions of dollars a year. The by-products of some manufacturing establishments are a source of large profit.

Wasting fragments has ruined many a business, and saving them has turned a deficit into dividends.

Everything that has in it the possibility of good ought to be saved. Fragments of time improved have made great scholars. Fragments of opportunity seized have saved souls.

We are dreaming that we would accomplish great things if we had time and means, while we may be letting slip through our fingers moments and means that might be turned to great use. There are fragments lying around us that would fill many baskets and feed many souls. Waste no bread, but gather it up and keep it for the hour of need.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. When the disciples proposed, "Send them away" (Mark), were they trying to escape an unpleasant burden?
2. In what ways may we say this to people we want to get rid of?
3. Give other instances in the Bible of services rendered by children.
4. In what ways may we use the principle of division of labor in religious work?
5. How does bread symbolize salvation?
6. How may we now distribute the bread of life to people?

LESSON VII.—NOVEMBER 16

PETER'S CONFESSION

Does It Matter What One Believes Concerning Christ?

Golden Text: Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. Matthew 16:16.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 84: 1–4.

Lesson Material: Mark 8: 27–29; Luke 9: 18–20.

Lesson Text: Matthew 16:13–20

13 ¶ When Jesus came into the coasts of Cæsarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?
14 And they said, Some *say that thou art* John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others Jeremias, or one of the prophets.
15 He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?
16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.
17 And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed *it* unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.
18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.
19 And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.
20 Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. ***The Question of Jesus to His Disciples.***
2. ***Peter's Impulsive Answer.***
3. ***Confession Crowned with Blessing.***
4. ***The Shadow of the Cross.***
5. ***Peter's Bad Blunder.***

Jesus was now busy moving about from point to point in Galilee, leaving behind him a trail of works of mercy. After his return from the Phenician coast to Lake Galilee a dumb man was healed, the four thousand were fed, the Pharisees were refused a sign and the disciples cautioned against them, and a blind man was healed.

Jesus with his disciples now went forth towards Cæsarea Philippi, apparently with the object of having a close private interview with them and making a momentous revelation to them.

1. The Question of Jesus to His Disciples

When they were far from the busy scene in which they had been moving, Jesus put to the disciples the question, "Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?"

This question is still throbbing in the heart of our civilization.

First asked by an obscure Galilean in that far-off solitude, it has come thundering down the ages and is the mightiest question in the world today. Ideas rule life and in the long run sway the world. What men think determines what they do and are. The theories that are generally held with reference to industry, wealth, government, art, morals and religion, mold human society into all its forms, as the hidden life of the tree determines every leaf and bud.

What men think of Christ is the master force in the world and more than anything else shapes its life.

The disciples gave the answers that men were giving. The answers were various, but they all agreed in viewing Jesus as an extraordinary character, at least a prophet, a mysterious personality containing an element of the supernatural.

Men are still giving various answers to this question, but they all take high ground with reference to his character and work.

The answer that Jesus was a myth, or a dupe, or an impostor, is no longer tolerated. Even the greatest sceptics see something in this man that they cannot explain on ordinary principles, and they pay tributes to him that fall little short of divinity.

"Religion," wrote agnostic John Stuart Mill, "cannot be said to have made a bad choice in pitching on this man as the ideal representative and guide of humanity; nor, even now, would it be easy, even for an unbeliever, to find a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete, than the endeavor so to live that Christ would approve our life."

Charles Lamb once said to a company of friends: "If Shakespeare should enter the room we should all rise; if Jesus Christ should enter, every one would kneel." How close such confessions come to acknowledging the very deity of Jesus Christ.

The general mind of the world feels that Jesus is a prophet in whose personality and power there is something supernatural.

Jesus now turned the general question into the sharp personal inquiry, "But whom say ye that I am?" This was the point he was aiming at and coming to, for just then the important thing was, not what men in general thought, but what these disciples thought of Jesus, for their thoughts were to determine the thoughts of the Christian world.

Important as is the general question, far more important to us each one is this individual question. No one can escape its sharp personal point. A neutral answer or attitude is impossible. Whatever we do is a decision; and nothing else goes so deep down and so far out into our lives as who we say Jesus is.

2. Peter's Impulsive Answer

"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," exclaimed the impulsive, fervent Peter.

This thought did not then come into Peter's mind for the first time: it had been growing there a long while; the evidence for it had been accumulating; experience had been confirming it; but now for the first time it flashed upon him in the full depth and intensity of its meaning and leaped into clear, strong and masterful expression.

It is a great confession from every point of view.

It grasps Christ as the Messiah, the fulfilment and perfect blossom of the old Dispensation. The Jews were blinded by their pride at this point and refused to see in the humble Nazarene the Messiah of God, but Peter and the disciples in the midst of prevailing unbelief and prejudice had insight and faith to see the truth.

The confession is great in that it exalts Christ as the Son of the living God, lifting him above humanity and crowning him with divinity.

This is the heart of our Christian faith.

It is the Godhood of Jesus that gives value and power to his mission and work. Deny him this crown and he is reduced to the level of our humanity, and the world is left without a redeemer that is mighty to save.

Why did Jesus ask the disciples this question? Did he not know what they thought of him? Yes, but he wanted to draw their faith out into full confession and thereby strengthen it.

Our beliefs grow deeper and more definite and vivid when they are expressed.

Public confession is especially potent in giving depth and stability and power to our beliefs. A real conviction can hardly be kept shut up in the mind: give it an outlet in expression and it mounts into mastery.

This is a fundamental psychological reason for confessing our faith before men.

3. Confession Crowned with Blessing

The great confession was instantly crowned with a great blessing. "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona." Faith in the Son of God is the root of all spiritual blessing, and every duty instantly brings its own reward.

This blessing had several elements. It was rooted back in the revelation of the Father. It did not spring up out of flesh and blood, but came down from above. Faith in Christ is a rational process according to the ordinary working of our minds, but deeper than our reason there is also the Father through his Holy Spirit revealing the truth unto us.

No one can come unto the Son except the Father draw him. God's love is older than ours, and at every step in redemption he goes before and is ahead of us.

The next blessing for Peter was that he should be a foundation stone in Christ's church: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." There is a play upon the words in Greek which may be brought out by translating: "Thou art rock, and upon this Rock I will build my church."

Few passages of Scripture have been the subject of so much controversy as this. The two main interpretations are, first, that the rock on which Christ will build his church is Peter himself, and, second, that this rock is the faith he has just confessed. The two views may be combined into the view that it is Peter as making this confession that is the foundation rock of the church. The Rock of Ages and chief cornerstone on which the church

is built is Christ himself, but on this Rock is laid the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20).

All believers are built into Christ's spiritual house as living stones (I Peter 2:5) and are thus a foundation for those that come after them and build on them.

Peter not only had the blessing of his faith in his own soul, but he had the farther privilege of imparting it to others. He started the walls of Christ's kingdom in the world, and this was a joy in itself. His work underlies our work and helps to bear us up today. We in turn enjoy the same privilege.

In so far as we are built on Christ and impart our faith unto others, we are living stones in the walls of the kingdom and foundation for those above us.

The same general explanation applies to the keys that were given unto Peter. Keys are symbols of authority and power. The supreme authority in the church is Christ himself (Rev. 3:7), but he delegates authority to apostles and ministers.

There must be government in the church or it would fall into inefficiency and confusion, and ministers and other officers are authorized to rule over its affairs, preach the gospel, administer the ordinances, admit members, and exercise discipline.

4. The Shadow of the Cross

And now across the path of the disciples for the first time fell the fateful shadow of the cross. From that time began Jesus to part the veil of the future before them and show them things to come.

He saw his path running straight up to Jerusalem into the murderous hatred of the priests and Pharisees; beyond their hatred he saw the terrible cross standing with its arms outstretched waiting to clasp and crush him in an agony of death in their bloody embrace; and beyond the cross he saw the power and splendor of the resurrection morning.

This had been hidden from the disciples, but Jesus had been bearing the momentous secret all along. The Lamb of God was slain from the foundation of the world, and before man sinned or ever the mountains were brought forth the Son gave himself to the work of redemption.

Jesus had spared his disciples this painful disclosure until they were able to bear it, and God often hides things from us in mercy and reveals them to us only as we are ready for them and can stand the strain.

"He must go to Jerusalem:" a strange place for the Son of God to suffer his last agony.

The city that had been exalted to heaven that it might receive the Messiah with sympathy and welcome was about to nail him upon a cross. Where roses ought to bloom, sin has often planted thorns.

5. Peter's Bad Blunder

Impetuous Peter could not stand this disclosure and broke out in the exclamation, "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee." This was just like Peter, unloosing his self-restraint and speaking unwisely with his tongue.

Having been the first to cheer the heart of Jesus with his noble confession, he was now the first to sadden him with a bad blunder. He began to rebuke Jesus for thinking he would be killed and declared it should not happen.

The plan of redemption unfolded by Jesus running back through eternity, was not to Peter's liking and he proposed to stop it! How true is this to Peter's short-sighted vision and impulsive nature.

But Jesus made short work with Peter's presumption. He unmasked him as the agent of Satan and bade him from his presence; he showed him up as a stumbling-block in the way; and he exposed the root of his folly in a worldly mind.

Never had such withering words from the lips of the Master fallen upon poor Peter; but he richly deserved the reproof.

This is what comes of our attempting to hinder God's ways and to put finishing touches on his plan. We frequently slide down into worldly views and utter foolish speeches.

God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, and the quicker we drop ours and take his, the better it will be for us. The way of the world is not the way of Christ. "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. Did Jesus have any curiosity to know what people were saying about him?
2. What are some of the answers people are giving today to this question?
3. What grounds have we for giving a true answer to the question?
4. Why will not a private personal answer to the question be sufficient?
5. Why does God hide so many things from us?

LESSON VIII.—NOVEMBER 23

THE TRANSFIGURATION

The Transfiguration a Preparation for the Cross

Golden Text: This is my beloved Son: hear him. Luke 9:35.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 86: 1–7.

Lesson Material: Matt. 17: 1–8; Mark 9: 2–8.

Lesson Text: Luke 9:28–36

28 ¶ And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray.
29 And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment *was* white *and* glistering.
30 And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias:
31 Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.
32 But Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep: and when they were awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him.
33 And it came to pass, as they departed from him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias: not knowing what he said.
34 While he thus spake, there came a cloud, and overshadowed them: and they feared as they entered into the cloud.
35 And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him.
36 And when the voice was past, Jesus was found alone. And they kept *it* close, and told no man in those days any of those things which they had seen.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. Jesus Steeped in Splendor.
2. Two Heavenly Visitors.
3. A Mistaken Proposal.
4. Cloud and Voice.
5. The Vanished Vision.

"O Master, it is good to be
Entranced, enwrapt, alone with thee;
Till we, too, change from grace to grace,
Gazing on that transfigured face."

The unexpected and startling announcement of Jesus to his disciples of his coming crucifixion must have shrouded them in gloom: it seemed the utter disappointment and destruction of all their hopes.

They needed a glimpse of the divinity that was hidden in Jesus and of the glory that lay beyond the cross to disperse the darkness and sustain and inspire them.

Possibly also Jesus himself, as he drew near to his passion, needed a fresh assurance of the Father's presence and love. The transfiguration met this need for both disciple and Master.

It was a revelation of power and glory that the cross could not crush. It shot its splendor through the gloom and kindled despondent faith and hope into new strength and joy.

1. Jesus Steeped in Splendor

The transfiguration is a mountain scene and ranks with Sinai and Calvary among the loftiest summits in the range of sacred story.

Jesus with Peter and James and John, his most intimate and trusted disciples, climbed the mountain slope to a place of prayer. It was night, and Jesus engaged in communion with the Father.

Presently the disciples were aware that a mysterious change was being wrought in the dim and dusky figure of the Master.

His face began to shine and his clothing to emit gleams and sparkles of light. The strange luminosity grew into effulgence until his countenance was radiant and his raiment dazzling white.

His whole person seemed steeped in splendor, a glory from within was streaming through the veil of his flesh.

There is a mystery here whose border we may not cross. There were divine possibilities in Jesus of which this transfiguration gives us a glimpse and hint.

It would seem that his divinity was hidden by the veil of his humanity and that for a moment its glory was kindled and burned through.

In a weaker degree Moses was transfigured when, after his forty days of communion with God on Sinai, his face shone; and they that looked on Stephen at his trial "saw his face as it had been the face of an angel."

Thus even the human spirit, when intensely kindled, shines through the flesh and in a degree transfigures it.

Of Daniel Webster it is recorded that, for several hours after he had delivered his great oration at Bunker Hill, his face wore an indescribably grand expression that awed those who came into his presence.

Character carves the countenance.

Sydney Smith said of Francis Horner that the Ten Commandments were written on his face. "Human physiognomy," says Victor Hugo, "is formed by the conscience and the life, and is the result of a multitude of mysterious excavations."

Some have become so sanctified by the Holy Spirit that they wear a heavenly aspect and are verily transfigured into the likeness of Christ.

It was as he prayed that Jesus was transfigured, and it was after forty days of communion with Jehovah that the face of Moses shone.

Prayer kindles the soul into intense consciousness of God, and it is then that the glory of holiness shines through.

2. Two Heavenly Visitors

Two visitors from the heavenly world now appeared upon the scene. Moses and Elijah, themselves shining with glory, talked with Jesus.

Few facts in the gospel story are so deeply and richly significant.

Moses, representing the law, and Elijah, representing the prophets, are here associated with Jesus, the Messiah whom they foretold and prepared the way for, thus binding the old and the new Dispensations together into unity. Redemption is the same through all ages and forms one plan. Immortality is here brought to light. These are travelers returned from the other world. Many centuries before, they quitted the habitation of earth, yet here they are alive.

Death does not end all.

They had the same bodies as on earth, only they were transfigured with glory, prophetic of the resurrection body. They were recognized as Moses and Elijah, thus illustrating the fact of heavenly recognition.

We shall know each other there.

They were in possession of the same human faculties that they had in this life. Death and heaven do not change the essential constitution and individuality of the soul.

The redeemed spirit is purified and glorified, but it is the same personality.

They talked with Jesus, showing that the redeemed are still interested in the affairs of earth. And what was the subject of their conversation? "His decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem."

Redemption is still the subject of greatest interest in heaven, and the very angels desire to look into it, and its point of intensest glory is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

If the heavenly inhabitants are so interested in this redeeming sacrifice, God forbid that we should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

3. A Mistaken Proposal

As the visitors were departing, impulsive Peter spoke up in a bewildered state of mind, saying, "Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias: not knowing what he said."

It was good for the disciples to be there. This revelation of the hidden power and glory in Jesus must have scattered their doubts and wonderfully revived and strengthened their faith.

In its splendor the cross was robbed of its shadows and terror. It threw the gate of heaven ajar and gave them a glimpse of the glory within.

Such a Master they could trust and worship.

It is good for us that the disciples were eyewitnesses of this event. Their record has inimitable marks of truthfulness, and the transfiguration is proof of the divinity of Jesus and of immortality.

As we stand in imagination upon this mountain, Jesus shines upon us as the Son of God, faith grows clear and strong, our blessed dead come near, and heaven lies round about us.

In so far as the Spirit of God burns in us and streams through us, we are transfigured, and this is good for us, even the most blessed experience of life.

Yet, blessed as was this experience, Peter was mistaken in his desire and proposal to protract it. Jesus had other work to do than enjoy his glory and the heavenly visitors could not tarry long on earth.

The Mount of Transfiguration is not a place to dwell: too much work is waiting for us on the plain below.

It is good for us to climb the mount of meditation and prayer and see God face to face and be transfigured before him, but we should not stay there too long. Religious rapture should not become a luxury that causes us to forget the great world lying in sin and want.

Prayerful meditation on the mount must be combined with active mercy on the plain to form the full-orbed Christian life.

Cloud and Voice

A cloud now overshadowed them and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is my beloved Son: hear him."

The cloud was a symbol of God's presence, but one that hid him from view: the voice was the voice of God, setting his seal upon Jesus as his Son and directing faith, obedience and love to him. The cloud shut the mystery and intolerable splendor of the Father's face out of sight, but the voice brought him near and declared his will.

The cloud concealed and the voice revealed.

This is the method of God in all his ways. He always hides much from us, and yet lets us know enough to do his will.

It is the glory of God to conceal a thing.

The ultimate nature of the world, of life, of the simplest and most familiar thing, is enveloped in a cloud. We cannot go far in our search into these things until we are lost in a maze of mystery. And God, the Infinite and Eternal, who inhabiteth immensity and jewels his garments with burning suns, who by searching can find him out? "Lo, these are but the outskirts of his ways: and how small a whisper do we hear of him!"

So God walks through the world trailing clouds of glory.

Yet this cloud does not envelop in doubt our duty. There is an infinite stretch of mystery which we cannot see, but there is always an edge next to us which we can see that lets us know what we are to do: there is a cloud, but out of this cloud comes a voice.

Nature hides much from us, but she takes care to let us know enough to do her will.

Great as is the mystery of God, yet we can know enough about him to live in harmony with him.

No one need be lost because he is involved in a cloud of mystery: God will let him know the truth that will save him. Out of the very heart of the mystery that conceals God comes the voice, "This is my beloved Son: hear him."

Jesus is the full revelation of God: he that hath seen him hath seen the Father.

He has authority to speak in the name of God: hear him.

Hear him as he speaks of sin and forgiveness: "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out."

Hear him as he speaks of the way of life: "He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

Hear him as he speaks of trouble: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me."

Hear him as he speaks of death: "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

Hear him as he speaks of the beyond: "In my Father's house are many mansions: I go to prepare a place for you."

Hear him, and shadows will lift from your path and your feet will find the way of life.

Thus the disciples were strengthened and guided and the Master himself was made calm and strong to bear his cross.

5. The Vanished Vision

The voice died away in the silence, the cloud melted into the invisible, and Jesus was found alone.

The transfiguration glory had faded from his person and he was his ordinary self.

Moses and Elijah had fulfilled their mission to earth and had vanished into the unseen world whence they had come. The affrighted disciples were bidden to arise. Life resumed its accustomed course.

The vision splendid had faded into the light of common day.

Intense ecstatic experiences cannot long continue. Nerves would snap and the brain break down. We cannot always live on the mountaintop.

Peter thought to retain Moses and Elijah, but they were not needed and were permitted to depart.

Jesus only is enough for us.

The disciples held their peace and told no man. They did not boast of their experience and blab it out.

Some things we must not tell. What we have seen in the secret place of the Most High is not to be a matter of public display and foolish speech. If we have been with God, we need not tell others: they will find it out.

Climb the mount of prayer and communion until you are transfigured before God: then come down into the world and say nothing about it, but get to work and heal some troubled soul.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. Where was the Mount of Transfiguration?
2. Give instances of how the mind has power over the body.

3. Why do not Moses and Elijah visit us?

4. Give other instances from nature and Scripture of how God both conceals and reveals himself.

5. Can we always live in a state of revival?

6. Why should we not tell too much about our private religious life?

LESSON IX.—NOVEMBER 30

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Whose Neighbor Am I?

Golden Text: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself. Luke 10:27.

Devotional Reading: I John 4:7-21.

Lesson Material: Matt. 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-31.

Lesson Text: Luke 10:25–37

25 ¶ And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?
26 He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?
27 And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself.
28 And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.
29 But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?
30 And Jesus answering said, A certain *man* went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded *him*, and departed, leaving *him* half dead.
31 And by chance there came down a certain priest that way; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.
32 And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked *on him*, and passed by on the other side.
33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion *on him*,
34 And went to *him*, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.
35 And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave *them* to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him: and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.
36 Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?
37 And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. A Lawyer's Sinister Question.
2. The Keen Answer of Jesus.

3. The Lawyer Has a Second Question.
4. The Parable.
5. The Application.

Stones are polished by the grinding of glaciers, and pearls are secreted out of the irritation and suffering of shell-fish.

Many of the most beautiful words and deeds of Jesus were drawn out of him by the attacks of his enemies. The Parable of the Good Samaritan, one of the finest jewels of the New Testament, was occasioned by an artful attack upon him by one of the scribes.

Never did Jesus show up to better advantage than in these dialectical efforts of his enemies to catch him in a trap, and this parable is the product of one of the keenest and subtlest of these hostile schemes.

1. A Lawyer's Sinister Question

A certain lawyer stood up and tempted him, saying, "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

There are good points in this question.

It is an inquiry worthy of our deepest interest and most earnest effort. It strikes through all outer circumstances into the inmost core of existence and lays hold on life itself; and it is not concerned simply with the passing forms of life, but it looks into the future and asks for life eternal.

Compared with this question, all the current questions of the day are as dust in the balance.

The question realizes that something must be done to inherit eternal life. This life is not bestowed upon us independently of our own choice and action, but must be secured through personal effort.

It is right to be interested in the eternal welfare of others, but no one is prepared to do this until he has obtained eternal life in himself.

The question was also put to the right teacher. Jesus is a Master who has authority on earth to answer this question; and to whom else can we go, for he only has words of eternal life?

Yet good as the question is, there are some unfavorable points in the questioner that vitiate his inquiry. He was a lawyer, a teacher of the divine law, and it was his business and duty to know the answer to this very question.

He was either ignorant of his own profession, or else he was feigning ignorance for some sinister purpose.

This latter supposition is confirmed by the statement that he tempted Jesus. Evidently he was trying to entangle the Nazarene and catch him by a cunning device. He was really seeking not instruction, but controversy.

Everything depends on the purpose for which and the spirit in which we ask a question. If we are sincere inquirers we shall find the way; but if we are trying to ensnare others we are likely to get lost ourselves.

Let us ask great questions as honest inquirers, and the answer will be forthcoming and we shall find eternal life.

2. The Keen Answer of Jesus

Jesus answered the lawyer's question by asking another. The Great Teacher was a master of dialectics, and no captious critic ever tried to catch him without getting caught himself.

"What is written in the law?"

There was a keen but quiet thrust in that question. The lawyer was referred to the law.

He was shown to be ignorant of his own profession and sent back to his own book. He did not need to ask this question, for he already had the means of answering it.

It was not more light he needed, but more use of the light he had. If we knew what is written in our Bible we would be saved from many questions and perplexities.

We are often searching for truth far off when the commandment is nigh us, even in our hearts. There is enough written for us already, and we do not need more light but clearer eye to see the light we have.

"How readest thou?" Another home thrust. It was this lawyer's profession to interpret the law, and yet he was missing its main point.

How we read is as important as what we read.

We can read truth so as to pervert it into error and turn its life into death. We can read the Bible systematically, meditatively, prayerfully and obediently, so as to grasp its truth and absorb its spirit; or we can read it hurriedly, superficially, thoughtlessly, skeptically, and get nothing out of it.

If we would read deeper into the Bible we would see more in it and get more out of it and have fewer perplexing questions to trouble us.

The lawyer, roused to some sense of the position in which his question had put himself, answered out of the law. His answer was taken from the Old Testament and is the same answer that is given in the New.

The answer makes the root of eternal life love for God. We live by love and out of no other root can life grow. Nothing else can be right as long as the center is wrong.

This love for God should be fervent, strong and intelligent. And having found God, love must next find man. The closer we are to God the nearer we are to one another, and every man becomes our neighbor.

So spoke the lawyer; and Jesus commended his answer and bade him do this and assured him he would have eternal life.

Thus responsibility was pressed home upon the lawyer. He knew more than he did. His creed was right, but his conduct was wrong.

We all know enough to save us. It is because our conduct lags so far behind our conscience that we get lost. If we will only do what we know we shall live.

3. The Lawyer Has a Second Question

The consistent course for the lawyer to have followed, had he been a sincere inquirer, would have been to begin the practice of his own profession.

But this was not the point he had in view, and he now gave another twist to the argument.

"But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbor?"

This was another unnecessary question with a wrong motive.

The question was unnecessary because he was a professional student and expositor of a Bible which told him the truth and gave him broad views on this point.

But Jewish pride and exclusiveness had made "neighbor" a narrow word that never got very far from home. Its breadth of human sympathy had been contracted into selfish caste.

The question, "who is my neighbor?" is likely to be the old heresy of Cain, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The man that begins to ask this question has already lost touch with humanity and contracted his horizon to a narrow circle. It is this question that splits society into classes and arrays races and ranks against one another.

Every human being is our neighbor. That poor man, that tempted man, that black man, that heathen man, that far-off man: he is your neighbor. "Who needs me is my neighbor."

The purpose of this question was even worse than its form: "willing to justify himself." This, then, was the poisoned point of his question. He was not seeking the way of life that he might walk in it, but he was aiming at justifying himself. The argument of Jesus was driving him into painful and humiliating self-condemnation, and he made desperate efforts at self-justification.

Of how many excuses and subterfuges and lies is self-justification the root!

The sinner becomes ingenious and expert at standing up before conscience and God and justifying himself. "I have done as well as could be expected." "I am no worse than others."

4. The Parable

It was at this point that Jesus introduced his superb parable. The steep, rocky road running down from Jerusalem to Jericho was familiar to his

hearers and may have been in plain view. The narrow path ran through defiles full of caves and hiding-places that were infested with robbers.

Down this road came a solitary traveler peacefully pursuing his journey, when, suddenly, highwaymen seized him, robbed and stripped him, beat him, and left him lying unconscious and bleeding on the stones.

A priest came down the same road, and, seeing the wounded man, crossed over to the other side and unconcernedly passed by. A Levite did the same thing.

There is always another side on the way of life along which we can slip and escape many burdens of our fellow men.

Priest and Levite, minister and deacon, the professional religionists, had no time or sympathy for a robbed and wounded man; there was no money in his pocket for them and he was not their neighbor.

Came next a Samaritan, a layman, a man of another race and religion, and a man with whom the Jews were at enmity; when he saw the wounded Jew, he had compassion on him and treated him as a brother. He bound up his wounds and then "set him on his own beast."

This pregnant little touch in the narrative is the very heart of the parable, the milk of human kindness in the core of the hard rough story.

The Samaritan put the wounded Jew in his own place, treated him as his own self. His own comfort was in having the stranger comfortable. His consciousness was of the other man. "Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them." "In all their affliction, he was afflicted."

This is the essence of Samaritanism, the very spirit of the gospel and the blood-red heart of the cross.

This is the wonderful answer that Jesus made to the question, "Who is my neighbor?"

This is the daring answer he gave to the Jews, holding up before them a despised Samaritan as an example, rebuking their formal selfish hypocrisy, and showing them by one counted by them a heretic and a heathen what true religion is.

5. The Application

Having drawn this picture Jesus now submitted to the lawyer which of these three was neighbor unto him that fell among thieves.

The great Teacher had made the truth so plain that he was willing to leave the answer to his captious critic himself.

Christianity grounds itself down on such plain and practical principles of life and duty that it dares to submit its reasonableness and obligation to our own minds and hearts.

And the lawyer answered, "He that shewed mercy on him." Shut up so closely to the truth, he could hardly go wrong. The insincere questioner was himself at last forced to tell the truth.

Yet Jesus told him nothing that he did not already know. He simply put the case before him so as to draw the truth out of his own knowledge and conscience.

Again it is impressed upon us that it is not new truth we need but a clearer apprehension of and a better obedience to the truth we have.

The Master's parting word to the lawyer is also his command to us: "Go and do thou likewise." This was the method and spirit of Jesus, and this should be the spirit in which we deal with people, especially the burdened and wounded and lost.

The roadsides of life along which we are traveling are lined with those that need our help, and we have it in our power to put our shoulders under their burdens and help them to healing and life. Only this spirit will save society.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. Give other instances in which scribes and Pharisees attacked Jesus with cunning catch questions.
2. To what extent does ignorance of our Bible prevail among us?
3. How can we better familiarize ourselves with our Bible?
4. How wide has our neighborhood become?
5. What are some social applications of this parable?

LESSON X.—DECEMBER 7

THE MAN BORN BLIND

Difficulties and Rewards of Confessing Christ

Golden Text: One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see. John 9:25.

Devotional Reading: Rev. 19: 1–8.

Lesson Material: John, 9: 1–41.

Lesson Text: John 9:13–17, 26–38

13 ¶ They brought to the Pharisees him that aforetime was blind.
14 And it was the sabbath day when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes.
15 Then again the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. He said unto them, He put clay upon mine eyes, and I washed, and do see.
16 Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath day. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them.
17 They say unto the blind man again, What sayest thou of him, that he hath opened thine eyes? He said, He is a prophet.

26 Then said they to him again, What did he to thee? how opened he thine eyes?
27 He answered them, I have told you already, and ye did not hear: wherefore would ye hear *it* again? will ye also be his disciples?
28 Then they reviled him, and said, Thou art his disciple; but we are Moses' disciples.
29 We knew that God spake unto Moses: *as for* this *fellow*, we know not from whence he is.
30 The man answered and said unto them, Why herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and *yet* he hath opened mine eyes.
31 Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth.
32 Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind.
33 If this man were not of God, he could do nothing.
34 They answered and said unto him, Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out.
35 Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when he had found him, he said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God?
36 He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?
37 And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee.
38 And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshiped him.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. The Blind Man.
2. Who Did Sin?

3. Opened Eyes.
4. Sensation Among the Neighbors.
5. The Pharisees Appear on the Scene.
6. "Lord, I Believe."

Jesus was now in Jerusalem on the occasion of the Feast of Tabernacles, which was the national thanksgiving week of the Jews celebrated in October.

He was now under strict surveillance, and the Pharisees were keeping close watch on his doings.

1. The Blind Man

"As he passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth." Blindness is common in the East where in some places one-fifth of the people have diseased eyes.

It is one of the most pitiful of human afflictions.

All splendor swept from the sky, no color upon the landscape, no beauty for the eyes, no face of friend ever seen, only groping and stumbling about in endless night. God save us from this and give us light!

But blind eyes are not the only blindness with which men are afflicted.

Ignorance is blindness that may be deep and is often guilty. Some people are blind to music and others to poetry. Carlyle had small respect for poetry and once wrote some rude lines to Mrs. Browning telling her, if she had anything to say, to say it in plain English.

Deeper still is blindness of the heart to the things of the spirit, to conscience, duty and God.

We may be unconscious of our physical and mental and spiritual defect, blind to our own blindness. But it is not a good symptom but a bad one when we cannot feel disease working in us, and we are far gone in sin if we are unaware of our sinfulness.

But if we know our blindness, there is hope for us.

2. Who Did Sin?

"And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" Their first thought was a cool, critical, cruel, theological question: How did this man get into trouble? not, How can we get him out?

They were only curious to know how the trouble began; not, how it might be ended.

Not only so, but they were willing to fasten on the poor man an ugly suspicion: that he had sinned and in retribution had been struck with blindness; and if they could not fasten this suspicion on him, then they would unload it on his parents. Instead of relieving him of his burden, they were disposed to lay on him a more cruel burden still; instead of taking away his blindness they would take away his honor.

They put the worst construction on his condition, and, having done this, would have passed on without a word or act of sympathy and help; perhaps feeling that they had done their whole duty towards the man in pointing out his sin and congratulating themselves on their superior virtue.

This is not altogether ancient history. We may do this very thing. It is always easier to be critical than correct.

When one is overtaken in a fault, blame him, charge him with some open or secret sin. If you cannot fasten the fault on him, then roll it on his parents or ancestry; revive some old and forgotten family scandal; say that he comes from a low family; dig up the bones of his grandfather and show of what coarse clay they were made.

Thus out of the misfortunes of others would we make capital for ourselves.

But Jesus answered, "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him."

All misfortunes cannot be connected with personal guilt. The Book of Job disposed of that theory.

Here is the contrast between the disciples and the Master. In the presence of pitiful human affliction they could think only of a curious theological question: he was filled with practical compassion; they were concerned only with how the trouble began: he was concerned only with how it might be ended; they were disposed to add to the poor man's misfortune the charge of personal fault; he was disposed to take both misfortune and fault away. They coolly speculated; he acted. That poor man's extremity was his opportunity.

Jesus did not care how the man got into trouble; his only concern was to get him out.

In the presence of the world's blindness and sin and sorrow, let us not coolly speculate as to causes and other people's fault, but touch blind eyes with healing hands and put our shoulders under others' burdens.

3. Opened Eyes

Action immediately followed. Means were used.

Even in his miracles Jesus kept near to nature, and the natural and the supernatural may be closer together than we think.

In using salve of clay on the eyes of this blind man the great Physician honored medical science and art. The "faith cure" receives little sanction from this act.

Not that the clay was the efficient means, but it was a means though we may not see how, and its use sanctions and enjoins the use of means in other cases.

Salvation is not a magical process, but definite means are used and it follows the line of strict causation. "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."

The blind man himself was given a part in the healing. "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam." Jesus supplied and gave efficacy to the means, but the man himself had to use them. Had he refused or neglected to do this, his eyes would never have been opened.

Divine sovereignty and human agency must work together at every point.

"He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing." A new world opened before his wondering eyes, at first dimly and then in increasing clearness. The valley of the Kedron rolled below him in a flood of color, the temple flashed above him, the sky was painful in splendor, the way back was a path of beauty, and he saw the face of Jesus.

When Jesus opens our eyes, we behold wondrous things out of his law, a new spiritual world flashes upon us, the splendor of divine life and love dawns within us, the path of duty becomes a path of beauty, and, following him, we shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life.

4. Sensation Among the Neighbors

The return of the blind beggar with restored sight created a sensation. There was a commotion among the neighbors. Some said that he was the man that had been blind; others said, No, but he is like him. The restored blind man did not conceal his identity but said, "I am he."

It took bravery to do this, for it instantly drew upon him the persecution of the Jews. It may still take bravery to confess Christ, but whosoever shall be ashamed of the Son of man, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed when he cometh in his glory.

When further questioned, the restored man told the simple story of his healing. Then his enemies tried to confuse him and scatter him, and while giving expression to great reverence for the most direct and powerful evidence of faith any soul can have, "Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not, one thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see."

What a good creed is this utterance! On this rock we rest. This inner experience of the healing power of Christ is one of the things that cannot be shaken.

Standing on this fact, we can defy all opposition and doubt.

It takes no learning to understand this evidence, but it can be the sure possession of the humblest soul.

5. The Pharisees Appear on the Scene

At this point the Pharisees appear on the scene, and from this moment they harass and pester the man with all kinds of questions to catch him in a trap.

They first seize on the fact that the alleged deed was done on the Sabbath day, and that day was a very sensitive point with them and was a pitfall in which they frequently tried to entrap Jesus.

When the restored blind man told them that the man put clay on his eyes and he washed and could see, they at once said that the man was not of God because "he keepeth not the Sabbath."

Others of their own number, however, could not agree to this easy disposal of the matter, and so "there was a division among them."

As they were in danger of falling out among themselves on this point, they dropped it and took another tack.

When they pressed him further as to how the healer had opened his eyes, the restored blind man began to pluck up his courage and to make sharp replies. He had told them, and if he would tell them again would they believe? "Will ye also be his disciples?"

This was too much for them and they now reviled him, saying, "Thou art his disciple; but we are Moses' disciples. We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this fellow, we know not whence he is."

Here is revealed the intense pride and haughtiness of these Pharisees, assuming that they are the favorites of God through Moses, and that nobody has any rights that they are bound to respect.

The man now grew exceedingly bold and delivered to them a logical lecture on theology, concluding with the unanswerable deduction, "If this man were not of God, he could do nothing."

Is not this the strongest evidence of the divinity and saving work of Christ to this day?

This reply enraged the proud Pharisees beyond all self-control and they retorted, "Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out."

Their pride could do no more than explode in these words and this act that really showed their furious impotence.

6. "Lord, I Believe"

The closing scene is a beautiful one. Jesus heard what the Pharisees had done, and then he found the man.

Is he not always looking for the man that has been "cast out"?

"Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" was the question he put to him. The man did not know and had had no means of knowing, and so he rightly asked, "Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?"

Already he has some glimmering of knowledge about Jesus and was suspecting that he was the Lord.

Jesus was quick with the full revelation, "Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee."

Was it not to a disreputable Samaritan woman that Jesus first made the revelation of his Messiahship in the simple words, "I that speak unto thee am he"? Did not the angels first announce the good news of the Saviour's birth, not to the doctors of divinity and theological professors up in Jerusalem, but to the shepherds out in their sheep pasture?

Verily, not many wise and mighty are chosen to hear the best news of God, but humble souls who have not been spoiled with their own conceit.

Then came the confession, "Lord, I believe, And he worshiped him."

"I know not what this man may be,
Sinner or saint; but as for me,
One thing I know, that I am he,
That once was blind, and now I see."

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. How did Jesus turn the blindness of the man to God's glory?
2. Is this principle one explanation of much suffering in the world?
3. How far are human ills due to ancestral sins?
4. In what ways do those whose eyes are opened by Jesus still suffer persecution?
5. What are good points in this restored blind man's creed?
6. What are the strongest evidences we can have of Christ's power to save?

LESSON XI.—DECEMBER 14

THE RAISING OF LAZARUS

Christ the Resurrection and the Life

Golden Text: I am the resurrection, and the life. John 11:25.

Devotional Reading: Psalm 91:1-7.

Lesson Material: John 11:1-44.

Lesson Text: John 11:31-44

31 The Jews then which were with her in the house, and comforted her, when they saw Mary, that she rose up hastily and went out, followed her, saying, She goeth unto the grave to weep there.

32 Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

33 When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled.

34 And said, Where have ye laid him? They say unto him, Lord, come and see.

35 Jesus wept.

36 Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him!

37 And some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?

38 Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it.

39 Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been *dead* four days.

40 Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?

41 Then they took away the stone *from the place* where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up *his* eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me.

42 And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said *it*, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.

43 And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth.

44 And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes; and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.

1. *A Delayed Arrival.*
2. *The Tears of Jesus.*
3. *At the Grave.*
4. *"Come Forth!"*

After the healing of the blind man, the opposition to Jesus grew so threatening that he retired from Jerusalem into the region of Perea, east of the Jordan, where he continued his ministry.

During his stay in Jerusalem he had made his home out at Bethany with Martha and Mary and Lazarus. While he was in Perea Lazarus fell ill and the sisters sent word to Jesus.

Jesus waited two days and then announced his purpose to return. The disciples remonstrated with him in view of the threatened stoning, but the only path of light that Jesus could walk in without stumbling was the path of duty.

Duty is ever the best life-preserver.

As he drew near to Bethany the active Martha hastened forth to meet him, announced to him the death of her brother, and heard from him the wonderful declaration, "I am the resurrection, and the life."

Martha then returned and called Mary to meet the Master.

1. A Delayed Arrival

When Mary met Jesus she fell at his feet and exclaimed, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." This was a common thought in the minds of the two sisters, showing their faith in Jesus as Lord.

During the long days of suspense in which they waited for him while the darkness deepened into death, they had doubtless often repeated these words as an agonized refrain and wondered why he did not come.

Our first thought in trouble should be to send for Jesus. When he is far from us, something is sure to go wrong.

If sickness does not invade the home, sin will invade the heart. We become absorbed in our pursuits and pleasures, spiritual realities lose their grasp and power, and life takes on a worldly hue. If Jesus had been with us these things would not have happened.

When Christ is in us, Satan must stay out.

His presence is protection against the real calamities of life: not against outer affliction but against inner evils. Keep the spirit of Jesus in the home and he will keep the home safe.

In the deepest sense he will abide with us always, yet sometimes when we send for him he strangely delays his coming.

Why did he calmly tarry two days across the Jordan while these distressed friends were waiting for him in such anxiety and Lazarus was dying? "For the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby."

The faith of these sisters was put under a tremendous strain, but it did not break, and at last it was greatly strengthened by this trial; and the divinity of Jesus shone out through this gloom in glorious splendor.

When Christ delays his coming it is only that he may accomplish a greater work that will bring a greater blessing and more fully manifest the glory of God. Delayed blessings may have grown richer through the delay.

God is always doing something for us, even when he seems to be doing nothing. "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart."

2. The Tears of Jesus

When Jesus saw the weeping sisters and friends, he was troubled in view of the bitter fruits of a sinful world and then was deeply stirred with sympathy. "Jesus wept." The son of God in tears! The shortest verse in the Bible crowds into two words one of its greatest truths.

This is the most expressive and impressive manifestation in the life of Jesus of his humanity.

What is more human than tears? The first utterance of the newborn babe is a cry, the rosy cheeks of childhood are wet with tears, mother weeps, and the man of iron breaks down and sobs like a child.

In the cradle and at the grave, in the cottage and in the palace, in every age and under every sky, in sorrow and in joy, tears flow from human eyes.

And when the Saviour of the world wept, though he was the Son of God in whom the fulness of the Godhead dwelt, yet he also showed himself our human brother.

By this act he identified himself with us in all the tissues of our being.

He also sanctioned our tears as a rightful expression of grief. It is a merciful provision in our nature by which we find relief in tears. The wounded heart is permitted to bleed and discharge its fulness through the eyes. The hardness of our grief is thus softened and dissolved.

There is nothing unmanly in tears. The stoicism that would have us suppress our grief is wrong.

It would destroy our finer sensibilities and turn our hearts to stone. Let nature be true to itself and apply its own balm. Let the aching heart have its relief.

Tears are divine as well as human. Jesus wept because he had lost a friend and thereby forever sanctioned and sanctified human tears.

The deepest meaning of this act was the sympathy of Jesus with his friends. He mingled his tears with theirs; in their affliction he was afflicted; and thereby he sustained and comforted them. It is a wonderful truth that Jesus is touched with the feeling of our infirmities and that the infinite heart of God is swept with tides of sympathy for us.

The majestic mountain reverberates with the crash and roll of thunder, but it also returns its echoes to human speech; it shouts with the storm, sings with the bird, and weeps with a lost child.

So God is our eternal Rock of Ages, and though he rolls back the mighty hosannas of the heavenly host, yet he also returns his voice to our prayer and praise and responds to the sobbings of his earthly children.

God is sensitive to human sorrows and our tears touch him. In a deep sense he weeps with those that weep, as he rejoices with those that rejoice. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.

The consciousness of this divine sympathy should be the deepest comfort of our human life. When we can lay our sobbing hearts on the everlasting Arm and feel the beating of infinite love, we are soothed into calmness and peace.

3. At the Grave

The sorrowing company had now reached the grave. But there was an obstruction in the way. A stone lay upon the cave and shut in the dead.

There are always stones between Christ and dead souls.

Ignorance is a stone behind which many souls are entombed. Prejudice, pride, the love of money, the fashion of the world, evil habits and companionships, all the forms of sin are stones upon the cave of entombed souls. Some of these stones have been rolled upon the mouth of the cave by other hands, and some have been dragged there by self-imprisoned spirits.

Christ cannot reach and save such lost ones unless these stones are rolled away.

"Take ye away the stone," said Jesus. He did nothing in this miracle that he could get others to do.

He used human help up to the farthest point it could go.

Many of the stones that shut in souls can be taken away by our hands. We can remove ignorance and misconception; we can do something towards loosening and removing prejudice and pride, evil habits and associations, worldliness and unbelief.

In so far as we can do this through our teaching and example and prayer, we are taking away stones that bar human hearts from the divine Christ.

The stone was removed, but a deeper difficulty was disclosed. "Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time the body decayeth; for he hath been dead four days."

The outer stone was a barrier thin as air compared with this inner corruption.

Back of the sinner's ignorance and unbelief and all the outer shapes of evil lie the sinner's depravity and death. He is dead in trespasses and sins, vile in his heart and an offence to God.

Jesus gave no command that human hands could take away this stone. This was the point where human ability ended and divine sovereignty had to begin. We can do something towards removing outer stones of evil, but before the inner corruption we stand helpless and dumb.

Some things in salvation we cannot do and must never attempt, but let God speak.

Jesus exerted himself in this supreme act by prayer. He intensified his consciousness of oneness with the Father. He touched up and grasped infinite life before he reached down and grappled with death.

Prayer is a necessary preparation for service. We must lay hold of God and get his power that we may roll away stones and lay hold of men.

4. "Come Forth!"

"Lazarus, come forth!" was the voice that went resounding through the tomb, shattering its bars and wakening its dead.

Death knew its Master had come. Instantly the King of Terrors dropped its scepter and freed its prisoner.

"And he that was dead came forth." The pulse began to beat, life returned, and the dead brother was restored.

Into this mystery we cannot penetrate a single step.

But it is no greater marvel than the first breathing of life into a human body. Birth is as wonderful as resurrection.

The springing grass is resurrection around us in a profusion of new life and beauty, but it makes little impression upon us because of its very familiarity. The God who waves his wand over nature and wakes it to new life can speak the mighty word that will open graves.

The miracle was Jesus proclaimed himself Lord of life and Master of death. The rocks and the tomb that swallow up our dead are shivered at his word, and at his bidding they shall come forth.

Out of this empty tomb shines the light of immortality.

This grave is luminous with glory. Here is a gleam of the resurrection morning. "Even so them which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."

Lazarus came forth bound head and foot. Converted souls enter the new life bound with the old fetters of sin. These cannot be instantly struck off.

Here begins the battle of the Christian life.

Jesus said unto them, "Loose him, and let him go." The moment he reached the point of human ability, he again called it into action.

God will do nothing for us that we can do for ourselves.

As there is work for us preceding conversion, so is there following it. We can remove the old bandages of sin.

Through our teaching and influence and prayer, we can unloose ignorance and old habits and let souls out into liberty and life. We are all more or less bound with our old grave clothes, and instead of criticising and judging and burdening one another, we should seek to loose others and let them go.

"And many of the Jews which came to Mary and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him." This was the reward of their sympathy. Their only thought was to comfort Mary, but in the end they received an unexpected blessing themselves.

Every good act we send out to others shall in some way come back freighted with blessing for our own lives.

So the home at Bethany had its broken circle restored and was filled with strange peace and joy. Such is the ministry of Jesus in every home when he enters and becomes one of its inmates.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. What are we to do when God delays answering our prayers?
2. Do not some people cry too easily and too much?
3. Mention ways in which we must cowork with God when he would bless us.
4. Why do we believe in immortality?
5. In what sense may Jesus abide with us in our homes?

LESSON XII.—DECEMBER 21

THE CONVERSION OF ZACCHAEUS

A Study of Conversion

Golden Text: For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. Luke 19:10.

Devotional Reading: Psalm, 24: 1–6.

Lesson Material: Luke, 19: 1–28.

Lesson Text: Luke 19:1–10

And *Jesus* entered and passed through Jericho.
2 And, behold *there was* a man named Zacchæus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich.
3 And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature.
4 And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him; for he was to pass that *way*.
5 And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchæus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house.
6 And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully.
7 And when they saw *it*, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.
8 And Zacchæus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore *him* fourfold.
9 And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham.
10 For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. An Outer Obstruction.
2. An Inner Infirmity.
3. Zacchaeus Sees Jesus Out of a Tree.
4. Jesus Goes Home with Zacchaeus.

Jericho plays an important part in Scripture story from the days when its walls fell flat before the marching host of Joshua to the day when Jesus visited it and left with it precious memories.

The name means the place of fragrance, the city of aromas, deriving this beautiful name from the balsam trees and spice gardens that scented all the air with sweet odors.

The founders of the city named it better than they knew, for Jesus perfumed it with some of the most gracious odors of his ministry. Here he healed Bartimæus as he sat blind and ragged by the roadside begging, and saved Zacchæus as he sat perched in a tree.

One day there was a great sensation in the sleepy old town. Word flew around that the Nazarene Prophet would pass through. He was now everywhere famous as a mighty wonder worker and bold preacher, and it was understood that the great ecclesiastics up at Jerusalem were about to take decisive action against him. The streets were lined and thronged with sightseers waiting his coming.

In all that multitude, possibly the two men that had the hardest lots, for whom there was the least esteem and respect, and on whom there was the slightest expectation or possibility of any blessing alighting, were Bartimæus and Zacchæus; yet they were to be the picked men and on them the greatest blessings were to fall that day; and out of all that crowd their names are the only ones that have come down to us. The last may be first.

Zacchæus had obstructions in the way of his seeing Jesus. It is harder for some people to be saved than others. They differ widely in their outer circumstances and inner temperaments, and these act as helps or as hindrances to their entering the kingdom.

Zacchæus had serious disadvantages in his way, but he got in.

1. An Outer Obstruction

His first disadvantage was the outer obstruction of his unpopular business. He was a publican or collector of the Roman taxes.

This business was unspeakably hateful to the Jews because it was a sign and form of Roman oppression and because in collecting the taxes the publicans resorted to every kind of threat and fraud to extort the last penny out of their victims. These taxes were "farmed out," the publican bidding in the taxes in his district and then squeezing all he could out of the people.

Now imagine the situation of a Jew who had been willing to engage in this business; a renegade Jew who had first become a traitor to his country and joined hands with its enemies and then had turned upon his own people to rob them. Would not all the contempt and scorn and malice of a hot-blooded Oriental race be poured upon him?

This was the unhappy position of Zacchæus. He was a chief publican, the head and front of the whole hated business.

And so he was everywhere socially ostracized, there was no place for him among that people, on every public occasion it was best for him to keep out of the way, and whatever was going on he was made to feel that he was not wanted.

Therefore when Jesus came through the town that day and the crowd was thronging around him, Zacchæus had no chance. He was contemptuously thrust out and pushed back and told to take himself off.

Zacchæus' business may be taken as an illustration of external difficulties in the way of seeing Jesus. Circumstances sometimes seem to block up the door to the kingdom of God.

There are businesses which no man can follow and be on the road to heaven. There are even legitimate lines of business in which it is hard to be a Christian.

Evil companionships are an obvious bar to the kingdom. A low social condition, such as is found in packed tenements and dens of iniquity in great cities, makes it hard to enter.

Thus there are outer obstructions that lie across many a man's path and seem to shut him out of the kingdom of God.

2. An Inner Infirmity

The second disadvantage of Zacchæus was an internal or personal one: he was little of stature, short, a mere mite of a man. When Jesus came through the town what chance did he have of seeing him in that pushing, surging, hostile jam? If he had been a big burly fellow he could have crowded his way through, but with his puny arms and short legs he was shut out.

It must have seemed to him that the very devil was taunting him with his infirmity, saying, "Aha! you little black fragment of sin, this is no place for you: get out and stay!" Thus this inner infirmity combined with the outer obstruction to keep the little renegade Jew from seeing Jesus.

This shortness of stature may stand for any personal trait that makes it difficult to see Jesus.

All have the same inner weakness of original sin, but in some it seems to be more quiescent, and in others more active and virulent. There are traits of disposition, such as pride, stubbornness, love of fashion and pleasure, that make it hard for one to enter the kingdom. Evil habits are chains upon the soul that one may not break with strong crying and tears.

Thus there are difficulties external and internal in the way of seeing Jesus and becoming a Christian, just as there are in the way of any good thing.

Zacchæus' case seemed hopeless that day. With the outer burden of his unpopular business and the inner infirmity of his short stature, he appeared to have no chance of seeing the Prophet.

Did he then despairingly give up and sullenly go back home? No, he came there to see Jesus and he did see him.

So the little man has pluck. There is not much of him, but what there is of him is good stuff.

His difficulties could not keep him away from Jesus; and our difficulties cannot keep us out of the kingdom of God if we only will to go in. God is faithful and will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able, but will with the temptation also make a way of escape.

3. Zacchaeus Sees Jesus Out of a Tree

How did Zacchæus overcome these difficulties and find Jesus? "He sought to see Jesus."

Probably his desire first grew out of his curiosity. He had heard of Jesus and knew that he had dared to rebuke and scorch the Pharisees, the bitterest enemies of Zacchæus, and he longed to see such a bold man and perhaps had some dim hope of receiving good from him.

Curiosity is not a high motive, but it is a good motive if it starts us to Jesus Christ.

It is the entering edge of knowledge, and may be the entering edge of faith and life. Salvation always start in desire. No one can be saved that does not desire to be saved.

It is intense desire that urges men to do great things, pierce mountains, win victories and build republics and empires, and only imperious desire can conquer sin and attain unto the victory of eternal life.

Zacchæus now put his wits to work and began to invent expedients. If he could not get through that crowd he would try getting ahead of it. And so he ran; his legs were short but he made good use of them and what they lacked in length they made up in speed; and thus he got to a point of view where the way was clear between him and Jesus.

Some difficulties that lie between us and the Christian life we may not be able to break through, but we can go around them and get ahead of them.

You may not be able to destroy the bad business or bad associations you are in, but you can get out of them. You may not be able to convert evil companions, but you can withdraw from them.

Zacchæus not only ran, but he also climbed; he pieced out the shortness of his stature by adding to it the height of that sycamore tree. He not only got away from the hostile crowd, but he got above it so that he could see over it.

To see Jesus we must get up above this world into a higher point of view.

We are too often down in an unspiritual crowd where we cannot see Christ. Get up into some tree of better thought and purpose, climb the tree of penitence, get up into the loftiest branches of prayer and vision, and you shall see Jesus.

Thus Zacchæus turned these very obstructions that kept him away from Jesus into stepping-stones to take him near. That hated Jew that had no chance in that hostile crowd, that little man of short stature that could not see anything, got the best view of Jesus that day.

So may we turn our hindrances into helps, and if we must get to Christ through obstructions and difficulties, infirmities and temptations, we may get all the closer to him.

Thus Zacchæus found Jesus.

4. Jesus Goes Home with Zacchaeus

How, now, did Jesus find Zacchæus? He came into Zacchæus' town and walked down Zacchæus' street along to the tree where Zacchæus sat perched, and then he looked up and the Saviour's eyes met the sinner's eyes, and they came together.

Zacchæus climbed into that tree to see Jesus, and to that same tree came Jesus, we know not from how far, along what weary way, to see Zacchæus.

Long before Zacchæus climbed into that tree Jesus was on his way to see him. The Saviour started to find us before we ever started to find him, even before the foundation of the world.

"And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him." How unexpected and startling was his address to Zacchæus and to the multitude? Zacchæus had no thought of being recognized or even of being seen by Jesus. The people also had no thought that Jesus would take any notice of the publican; he was the last man in their judgment that had any such chance. But at the place where this man sat in the tree Jesus stopped and looked up and said unto him: what did he say?

He did not say anything unkind to him. He made no allusion to his unpopular business or unjust practices or bad reputation. Not a word was said to sting and humiliate the publican before the crowd.

But Jesus simply said, Zacchæus, come down, I am going home with you today.

The effect was electrical. The people were astonished and grew critical and resentful. Many were shocked and scandalized at the dreadful turn of affairs. "Gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner," was their contemptuous judgment.

But Zacchæus was as one in a dream. He had never heard such words before. They were the first human brotherly words spoken to him since he had taken up the business of collecting the taxes.

They touched a chord in his heart that had long been silent. They made him feel that he was not an outcast and was still human.

Jesus simply treated this lonely persecuted man as a brother.

And it broke him all up: it melted him into instant faith and love and obedience. And he made haste and came down and received Jesus joyfully.

Conversion struck clear through him. Even his pocketbook did not escape.

Is not this the gospel in its simplicity and saving power?

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. What other publicans appear in the gospels?
2. Why are taxes unpopular in all countries? Should they be so?
3. Are there outer and inner obstructions in the way of other good things, such as education?
4. How may we go to Jesus and how is he coming to us?
5. What effect should conversion have on our whole life?

LESSON XIII.—DECEMBER 28

REVIEW: CENTRAL PERIOD OF CHRIST'S MINISTRY

Central Period of Christ's Ministry

Golden Text: He that hath seen me hath seen the Father. John 14:9.

Devotional Reading: Matthew 25: 31–36.

LESSON PLAN

Introduction.
1. Notable Teaching.
2. Notable Miracles.
3. Notable Revelations.
4. Notable Healing Power.

The Fourth Quarter covers the central period of the ministry of Jesus and extends from the choosing of the Twelve in Galilee to the conversion of Zacchæus at Jericho.

1. Notable Teaching

The ministry of Jesus had now reached the point where it was necessary to select an inner band of disciples to associate with himself in personal intimacy that they might receive and absorb his teachings and thereby be prepared to carry on his work after his departure.

> These twelve names are probably the most important list of names in the history of the world.

To them was committed a message and a mission compared with which writing philosophies or building empires is superficial and temporary work.

> Yet they were not men of learning or genius but plain unlettered men, and Jerusalem the proud capital of the country was not permitted to put one name in this immortal list.

The Sermon on the Mount followed the choosing of the Twelve, for this contains the substance and spirit of the message they were to preach.

The section contained in the lesson deals with prayer, a fundamental fact in the kingdom of God.

Jesus warned against prayer as a performance and as a repetitious round, for these were prevailing faults, in the praying of the Jews, and they still lurk in our praying. He gave them the Lord's Prayer, which is the model for all our prayers in brevity, simplicity and spirituality, chiefly concerned with the things of God and of the spirit, only once touching our material life

It reaches its climax and conclusion in the ascription of the kingdom and the power and the glory to God, for these are the highest ideals and aims in the universe and only as we keep them in view can we attain to the heights of our human life.

The parable of the Sower gives us another instance of the teaching of Jesus. It illustrates four kinds of soil in which seed is sown, and these illustrate as many kinds of hearers. Wayside roads are beaten down by travelers so that the seed cannot find lodgment, stony soil offers no depth, thorns choke the tender plants, and the good ground bears many fold.

So may we receive the good seed of truth on hard hearts trampled down by worldliness, or into the thin soil of emotionalism, or into the thorns of anxiety, or into good hearts that will bear abundant harvests.

2. Notable Miracles

Jesus frequently found himself worn to the point where rest and a change of scene were necessary, and after a busy day of teaching he directed the disciples to cross Lake Galilee. A storm blew up on that little lake so subject to sudden and violent squalls, and soon the disciples were in fear and panic.

Jesus was asleep in the boat, a beautiful touch of his humanity.

He was weary and had a good conscience and committed himself to the Father, and these are the conditions and secret of good sleep.

The disciples woke him up with cries of distress, and then he stood upon the deck and showed himself master of the storm. At his word the waves fell flat and the sea grew calm.

The sea has long been a symbol and picture of our human life in its beauty and mystery and storm and tragedy, and the guarantee of security is to have Christ aboard our boat.

The parable of the Prodigal Son is a complete picture of the way of salvation from the departure of man from his Father's house to his return in penitence.

The prodigal grew dissatisfied with the old home and thought he could have a better time elsewhere. The father gave him his wish, and off he went and soon had spent all his money in riotous living and was at the bottom of the hill feeding pigs and living a common life with them.

Reflection brought him to his senses and then he started back home. The father was waiting and watching for him and met him, and then the old homestead was agleam with lights and resounded with minstrelsy and dance.

All this pictures our own poor human kind in its waywardness and folly and its bitter end in sin, and the wonderful patience and loving heart of our heavenly Father, and the pardon and peace and joy that will welcome us back into his fellowship.

Feeding the five thousand was another notable miracle that illustrated the resources of Jesus. It was no easy problem to take care of such a multitude at the evening hour, and the disciples thought the best way to get rid of the trouble was to send the people away and let them take care of themselves.

But Jesus had a different mind and heart and called upon the disciples for such means as they had.

Only a boy and a basket were available, but with these few loaves Jesus fed the great throng and still twelve baskets of fragments were left, which were carefully gathered up.

There is a vast multitude of people in this world and they are often hungry for the bread of earth, but they have a deeper hunger in their need of the bread of heaven.

Jesus supplies this bread in boundless abundance, and it is our mission to distribute it among the people.

3. Notable Revelations

Jesus wanted to know what the people were saying about him, and this is still the most important question in the world. Ideas rule life, and the

world's belief about Jesus Christ will in the long run shape its civilization and destiny.

More important still is the sharp personal question as to what we each one think about Jesus, and this is pressed upon us with its unescapable point.

Peter gave a great answer to the question in his exclamation that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God, and this answer still tells the truth as no other words can.

The answer brought a great blessing to Peter and it will bring the same blessing to us.

Yet Peter followed up his good confession with a bad blunder, and we cannot be too careful that when we think we are standing we do not fall.

This revelation that Jesus is the Son of God was wonderfully confirmed and illuminated in the transfiguration scene. Jesus stood on that mountain-top steeped in splendor because he had let loose the divine effulgence that was always concealed within the veil of his flesh.

Two heavenly visitors shared in the scene, and their presence is richly significant as they were travelers returned from the other world. The cloud and the voice brought out the meaning of the event, the cloud concealing and the voice revealing the presence of God.

And still God walks through the world trailing clouds of glory and speaking in many voices so that we can always know his will.

Though Peter wanted to stay, yet that was no place to stay, and soon the vision vanished and life resumed its common light and level. We cannot live on mountain tops, for such life would be too intense and ecstatic, and we must commonly live down on the plain.

Having seen the transfigured Christ in our private worship, we are not to boast of it but say nothing about it and get back to our work.

Another revelation of the nature of Jesus is given in his parable of the Good Samaritan. A Jewish lawyer was trying to catch Jesus in a dialectical

snare, but Jesus was too much for his cleverness and caught him in his own net.

It was to show this lawyer who his neighbor was that Jesus uttered the parable. A robbed and wounded Jew lay by the roadside running down to Jericho, and priest and Levite passed by him on the other side of the way.

> Came then a Samaritan, a man of another race and religion, and he took care of the Jew and thereby showed that any man in need is our neighbor, which is the Christian doctrine to this day, though sadly in need of practice.

4. Notable Healing Power

Blindness is one of the most hopeless and pitiful of human afflictions, robbing the world of its color and shutting life up in a pathetic prison deeper than in any dungeon.

The disciples looked on the man and then asked a cool, critical, theological question about the origin of the affliction, whether it was due to the man's own sin or to that of his parents.

> Jesus had no interest in such a question in the presence of the afflicted man, but used means and opened his eyes and let a new world flood his wondering soul.

The appearance of the man with his eyes opened created a sensation among the neighbors who at once started a discussion as to whether he was the same man or some one else. Then the Pharisees appeared on the scene and raised further theological difficulties.

> Jesus found the man and led him into personal acquaintance with himself as the Messiah and Son of God. "Lord, I believe, and he worshiped him," was the fitting conclusion of the miracle.

The power of Jesus was revealed in a still more notable way in his raising Lazarus from the dead. He was over in Perea when word was brought to him of the illness of Lazarus, but he delayed two days before starting for Bethany. He did this deliberately for a special purpose, and God always has reasons when he seems to be slow in answering our prayers.

When he arrived and heard of the death of Lazarus "Jesus wept", and

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these two words are among the most meaningful and precious words in the Bible.

At the grave he told others to take away the stone, always giving his disciples something to do, and then spoke the words that shook that grave and all the graves in the world with the power that emptied that tomb and will in time empty all the tombs on the earth.

It was a great miracle, but all miracles are equally easy to the Lord Jesus, and it shines with the light of his own divinity and of our own immortality.

Still another instance of the gracious power of Jesus was illustrated in the conversion of Zacchæus. He was a tax collector and had little chance of seeing Jesus on the day when the Nazarene passed through the old town of Jericho.

His unpopular business was an outer obstruction and his short stature was an inner infirmity that seemed to shut him out.

Yet he desired to see Jesus, and this urgent desire was an imperious power that drove him on to find ways and means.

He ran ahead of the throng and climbed up into a tree and sat there waiting for the Prophet to come along.

Along that same street and to that same tree came Jesus looking for Zacchæus, and when he looked up and saw him he spoke no unkindly word but simply told him to come down for he was going home with him that day.

The crowd were scandalized, but Zacchæus was as one in a dream and came down and addressed Jesus as Lord and said he would make good any fraudulent tax he had collected, fourfold.

Jesus went home with him, and this is salvation in its simplicity and saving power.

Suggestive Questions and Topics

1. Give a sketch of the course of events in this Quarter.
2. Why was it necessary for Jesus to narrow his work specially to twelve disciples?
3. Why did Jesus work miracles?
4. In what ways is Jesus still teaching and exercising saving power in the world?

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